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FEDERICO GARCIA LORCA:

Three Short Plays *

Translated by Tim Reynolds

Buster Keaton's Promenade

Characters

Buster Keaton
The Rooster
The Owl
A Negro
An American Woman
The Girl

Rooster: Cockadoodle dooo.

(Buster Keaton enters leading his four sons.)

Buster Keaton (drawing a wooden dagger and killing them): My poor little sons.

Rooster: Cockadoodle doooooooooo.

Buster Keaton (counting the bodies on the ground): One, two, three, and four.

(He seizes a bicycle and rides. Between the old rubber tires and the drums of gasoline, a Negro devours his straw hat.)

* Acknowledgment is made to Aguilar (Madrid), publisher of Garcia Lorca's *Obras Completas*.

Buster Keaton: What a beautiful afternoon!

(A parrot flutters in the empty sky.)

Buster Keaton: I *love* to ride around on a bicycle.

The Owl: Hooo, hooo, hooo.

Buster Keaton: How well the birds are singing!

The Owl: Hooooooooooo.

Buster Keaton: It's touching.

(A pause. Buster Keaton rides lightly across rushes and a field of rye. The landscape shrinks between the wheels of his bicycle. The bicycle is one-dimensional. It can go into books and stretch itself out in bread ovens. Buster Keaton's bicycle does not have a caramel saddle and pedals of sugar, as bad men might prefer. It is like any other bicycle, but this is the only one impregnated with innocence. Adam and Eve would run, frightened, across the stage if they should see a glass of water. But they would caress Buster Keaton's bicycle as they passed.)

Buster Keaton: Ah, love, love!

(Buster Keaton falls to the ground. The bicycle gets away from him. It careens behind two large grey butterflies. It runs wild one-half millimetre above the ground.)

Buster Keaton (rising): I don't want to say anything. What shall I say?

A Voice: You fool.

(He continues walking. His eyes, infinite and sad, like those of a newly-born animal, dream of lilies, angels and silken sashes. His eyes are like the bottoms of glass bottles. Eyes of a stupid child. That are happy. That are beautiful. Eyes of an ostrich. His human eyes in the safe equilibrium of melancholy. Philadelphia is seen in the distance. The residents of this city now know that the old poem of the Singer machine can move among the great hothouse roses, although they can probably never understand what subtle poetic difference exists between a cup of hot tea and another cup of cold tea. Philadelphia glows in the distance.)

Buster Keaton: This is a garden.

(An American Woman with celluloid eyes comes through the grass.)

American Woman: Good afternoon.

(Buster Keaton smiles and looks fixedly at her shoes. Oh, what shoes! We cannot permit those shoes. It takes the hide of three crocodiles to make them.)

Buster Keaton: I should like . . .

American Woman: Do you have a sword decorated with myrtle leaves?

(Buster Keaton shrugs his shoulders and lifts his right foot.)

American Woman: Do you have a ring with a poisoned stone?

(Buster Keaton closes his eyes slowly and lifts his left foot.)

American Woman: Well? Well?

(Four seraphim with wings of celestial gauze dance among the flowers. Heavenly women play the piano as if they rode bicycles. The waltz, the moon and the canoes strike horror into our friend's precious heart. To the great surprise of all, Autumn has invaded the garden as water invades a geometric lump of sugar.)

Buster Keaton (sighing): I should like to be a swan. But I can't, although I should like to be. Where would I leave my hat? And my lovely collar and the cravat with the little paper rooster. What a misfortune!

(A wasp-waisted girl with high breasts rides in on a bicycle. She has the head of a nightingale.)

The Girl: To whom have I the honor of addressing myself?

Buster Keaton (bowing): To Buster Keaton.

(The Girl faints and falls from the bicycle. Her slender legs tremble upon the lawn like zebras in agony. A gramophone roars with a thousand simultaneous voices: "In America there are no nightingales!")

Buster Keaton (kneeling): Miss Eleanor, forgive me, I haven't been myself! Miss Eleanor! (In a low voice.) Miss Eleanor! (Lower.) Miss . . .

(He kisses her. On the horizon, in Philadelphia, the badges of policemen glitter like stars.)

The Virgin, the Sailor and the Student

Characters

The Virgin
An Old Lady
The Mother
The Sailor
The Student

(The Virgin is embroidering on the balcony of her home.)

Old Lady (in the street): Snails! Snaaaiiils! Cook them with mint, saffron and laurel leaves!

Virgin: Little snails, from the country, all heaped up in the basket. They look like some old Chinese city.

Old Lady: This old lady sells them. They are big and dark. Four of them are a match for a snake. What snails! Good Lord, what snails!

Virgin: Let me do my embroidering. My pillowcases have no monograms, and that disturbs me. Because what nice young lady in the whole world has no initials on her things?

Old Lady: How is my lady today?

Virgin: I'm embroidering the whole alphabet on my clothes.

Old Lady: Why?

Virgin: So the man who sleeps with me may call me whatever he wants.

Old Lady (sadly): Then you are shameless.

Virgin (lowering her eyes): Yes.

Old Lady: Will he call you Mary, Rose, Trinket? Lulubelle?

Virgin: And more, many more.

Old Lady: Eustacia? Dorothy? Janet?

Virgin: And more, more, more . . .

(The Virgin raises the palms of her hands, pale from the insomnia of silks and embroidery hooks. The Old Lady leans against the wall, toward her Siberia of dirty rags, where a basket of breadcrumbs is in its death-throes.)

Virgin: A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J, K, L, M, N. There, that's enough. I'll shut the balcony. I can go on embroidering behind the glass. (A pause.)

Mother (inside): Daughter, daughter, are you weeping?

Virgin: No. It is only the rain beginning to fall.

(A motorboat full of blue flags crosses the bay, leaving behind its stuttering song.
The rain presents the mortar-board of a Litt. D. to the city.
In the taverns near the docks the usual riot of drunken sailors commences.)

Virgin (singing): A, B, C, D.
Which letter? I wish I knew.
I shall start, I think, with an S,
for sailor, and student too.
A, B, C, D.

Sailor (entering): It's me.
Virgin: You.
Sailor (sadly): A boat's a little thing.
Virgin: I shall cover it with flags and candy.
Sailor: If the captain wishes it.
(A pause.)
Virgin (now sad herself): A boat is a little thing!
Sailor: I'll stuff it with lace doilies.
Virgin: If my mother allows me.
Sailor: Stand up.
Virgin: Why?
Sailor: So I can see you.
Virgin: I'm up now.
Sailor: What magnificent thighs you have!
Virgin: As a little girl I rode a bicycle.
Sailor: And I a dolphin.
Virgin: You're beautiful too.
Sailor: When I'm naked.
Virgin: What can you do?
Sailor: I can row.
(The Sailor plays a dusty accordion as weary as the 17th century.)
Student (entering): It goes much too fast.
Virgin: What goes too fast?
Student: The century.
Virgin: You are upset.
Student: The fact is, I am escaping.
Virgin: From whom?
Student: From next year.
Virgin: Haven't you seen my face?
Student: I am stopping because of it.

Virgin: You aren't a bit dark.
Student: Because I live only by night.
Virgin: What do you want?
Student: Give me water.
Virgin: We haven't a well.
Student: Then I will die of thirst!
Virgin: I will give you the milk of my breasts.
Student (enflamed): Sweeten my mouth.
Virgin: But I am a virgin.
Student: Toss me a ladder, and we shall be together tonight.
Virgin: You are pale. You will be very cold.
Student: My arms are very strong.
Virgin: I would, if my mother would let me.
Student: Come.
Virgin: No.
Student: And why not?
Virgin: Just because I won't . . .
Student: Come . . .
Virgin: No.

(A wheel of black brigantines revolves around the moon. Three sirens, spattering in the waves, lure soldiers off a cliff. The Virgin on her balcony considers leaping from the letter Z and plunging into the abyss. Emilio Prados and Manolito Altolaguirre,* flour-white for fear of the sea, remove her gently from the balcony-rail.)

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* Spanish authors, and Lorca's friends, to both of whom Lorca had dedicated poems in more orthodox fashion. Both published (in Spanish-language periodicals) prose and poetic homages to Lorca after his death.

Chimera

Characters

Henry
The Woman
Old Man
Small Girl
Voices
Small Boy

Henry (at the doorway): Goodbye.
Six Voices (inside): Goodbye.
Henry: I will be a long time in the mountains.
Voice: A squirrel.
Henry: Yes, a squirrel for you and five birds, besides, like no children ever had before.
Voice: No, I want a lizard.
Voice: And I want a mole.
Henry: You are very different, children. I'll get you all what you want.
Old Man: Very different.
Henry: What did you say?
Old Man: May I carry your bags?
Henry: No.
(Children's laughter is heard.)
Old Man: Those are your children?
Henry: All six.
Old Man: I've known their mother a long time, your woman. I was a coachman in her house, but, to tell you the truth, I'm doing better as a beggar. Horses! Ha ha ha! Nobody knows how much I am afraid of horses, may lightning blast their eyes. It isn't easy to drive a coach. Oh, it's most difficult! If you aren't afraid, you don't understand, and if you understand, you aren't afraid. May God damn horses!
Henry (gathering his bags): Let me do it.
Old Man: No, no. For the tiniest small coins you have in your pocket, I'll carry your bags. Your wife will be grateful. She wasn't afraid of horses. She's happy.
Henry: Let's go soon. I have to catch a train at six.
Old Man: Ah, the train! That's something else again. The train is nothing. If I lived for another hundred years, I'd never be afraid

of a train. Trains aren't alive. They pass and they have passed. But horses . . . Look.

Woman (in the window): Henry. *My* Henry. Be sure to write. Don't forget me.

Old Man: Ah, the girl! (Laughs.) You remember how she used to jump the mud fence, how she used to climb the tree, only to see you?

Woman: I'll remember until I die.

Henry: I will too.

Woman: I'll wait. Goodbye.

Henry: Goodbye.

Old Man: Don't be unhappy. She's your woman and she loves you. You love her. Don't be unhappy.

Henry: That's true, but it hurts me to be away.

Old Man: There are worse things. It's worse that everything is moving, and that the river floods. A cyclone would be worse.

Henry: I'm not in the mood for jokes. You're always like that.

Old Man: Ha ha ha. Everybody in the world, and you most of all, think the importance of a cyclone is the damage it does, and I believe exactly the opposite. The importance of a cyclone . . .

Henry: Let's go. It's going to strike six any minute.

Old Man: Well, and the sea? In the sea . . .

Henry (furious): Let's go, I said.

Old Man: You aren't forgetting anything?

Henry: I leave everything perfectly organized. And besides, what business is it of yours? The worst thing in the world is an old servant, a beggar.

Voice 1: Papa.

Voice 2: Papa.

Voice 3: Papa.

Voice 4: Papa.

Voice 5: Papa.

Voice 6: Papa.

Old Man: Your children.

Henry: My children.

Small Girl (in the doorway): I don't want a squirrel. If you bring me a squirrel, I won't love you. Don't bring me a squirrel. I don't want one.

Voice: Nor I a lizard.

Voice: Nor I a mole.

Small Girl: We want you to bring us a collection of minerals.
Voice: No, no, I want a mole.
Voice: No, no, the mole is for me.
(Quarreling within.)
Small Girl (coming on stage): The mole is going to be mine.
Henry: Enough! Be satisfied!
Old Man: You said that they were very different.
Henry: Yes. Very different. It's a good thing.
Old Man: What?
Henry (shouting): A good thing!
Old Man (sadly): A good thing. (They leave.)
Woman (in the window): Goodbye.
Voice: Goodbye.
Woman: Come back soon.
Voice (distant): Soon.
Woman: He will be well covered tonight. He carries four blankets. But I will be alone in the bed. I will be cold. He has wonderful eyes, but what I love in him is his strength. (Undressing.) My back hurts a little. Ah! If he would only despise me! I want him to despise me . . . and love me. I want to run away so he can catch me. I want him to burn me . . . to burn me. (Loudly.) Goodbye, goodbye . . . Henry, Henry . . . I love you. You look so small. You are jumping around among the rocks. So small. Now I could swallow you like a button. I could swallow you, Henry . . .
Small Girl: Mama.
Woman: Don't go out. A cold wind is coming up. I said no! (Withdrawing.)
(The light slips away from the scene.)
Small Girl (rapidly): Papaaa! Papaaa! Bring me a squirrel. I don't want minerals! The minerals will break my nails. Papaaa.
Small Boy (in the doorway; very slowly): He doesn't hear you. He doesn't hear you. He doesn't hear you.
Small Girl: Papa, I want the squirrel! (Breaking into tears.) Please God! I want the squirrel!

WALTER CLEMONS:

Nana Shellbean

Two boys had a fight at lunch recess. As we crowded around, yelling, a pair of sharp hands clapped behind us. We turned. The wind flapped the starched wings and black veil around Sister Ida's fierce, nutty, lipless face. When she pushed in and grabbed each fighter by an ear, I saw my chance to sneak away across the schoolground. At the church door, of dark stained planks bound with iron, I looked back. Sister Ida was wringing the two boys and didn't see.

The empty church was cool. I fell on the grey stones, and when my knees ached I flattened out full length, praying with my eyes shut. I cried also. Then I pulled myself up to peer over the back pew. Far off, there were white gladioli on the altar; nobody there. I dusted my cold knees and checked the purple-curtained confessionals before tiptoeing up the side aisle. At the brass stand of candles in dark red cups, I struck a match and began to light up the whole works. I had about twenty going, tier on tier like a toy bleachers, when my left ear jerked my head backward and snapped my neck. I whirled and was smothered in black veils. She was everywhere. Sister Ida huffed out twenty candles as easily as a birthday cake and still had breath to shrivel my insides with a whisper: "Devil! What do you think you're doing?" I shook my head like a terrier but couldn't get my ear out of the crab-claw or elude her yellow eyes. "There's a devil in you that makes you act like this," Sister Ida explained. When I started to cry, my glasses fogged up. "Devil!" she said again.

I was in the second grade, my brother was in the first. On Sundays our grandparents rolled up in front of the house and drove us to church in their long, slow black Packard with white tires, jump seats in the back and fringed handles by the windows to cling to. Our father had been raised a Catholic, our mother a Methodist, and neither of them came along in the Packard. Nor had either of them heard Sister Ida's spectacular description of what was in store for people who didn't make it to Mass on Sundays. I was too cowed to tell them. But that was it. The End of the World meant I'd have to go off lonely and orphaned to Heaven. I huddled with my missal in church, secretive and morose, and racked up a big total of days of indulgence for

my parents, cunningly selecting prayers with the most days promised in parentheses. I did this without much hope, though, knowing they availed only against venial sins. Sister Ida had made it clear as fire that missing Mass was Mortal. Overhead, the massive oak beams stretched from wall to wall; the organ groaned behind me. A thick sadness would begin to flow in me, heavier than blood. It rose into my throat, and tears took over.

This crying was an embarrassment to me. I never knew when it might commence. Across from me at dinner one night sat my father's boss, so red and smooth and full in the cheeks if he cut himself shaving he would gush like a plum. When I bent over my plate, tears dripped on my rice-and-gravy. Our guest, meaning to be friendly, came out strong against crying. I didn't see him crying, he pointed out. Disgraced, I slid down off my chair. In a while, my mother came and sat on my bed in the dark. "What is it?" she said softly. "Can't you tell me?"

She stroked the hair from my forehead with her cool fingers, while I took what comfort I could from smelling her. I said reluctantly, "In the paper." Her perfume faded away. I lay in the dark listening to her high-heeled shoes, like waiting for medicine. She clicked the ceiling light on, and the evening paper crackled in her hand. Some more crying; then I showed her the man in armor, with "Mars" on his chest, striding toward a cowering lady named "Europa" over whose head hung a dark cloud with the word "Blackout" in white letters. While my mother undressed me and folded my glasses, she said that if there should be a war in Europe, I would be safe here at home. I wasn't to worry. Her hand with rings on it and her blue silk dress, her perfume and her voice, soothed me to sleepiness without her ever touching the center of my concern. I got it straight about "Mars" not meaning an invading planet; she didn't think to mention that "Blackout" meant darkening a city against air-raids. I thought it was a word for the End of the World. Sister Ida had said it was coming, and now it was in the paper.

My mother left me. I went to sleep and had my dream, in which however my parents and I started out, we soon got to a stretch of bald country. There, the ground split open, as in the movie *San Francisco*. I was marooned on one side of the deep crack, my parents on the other; my brother wasn't along; as I cried out for them a wind blew them away like paper dolls. I waked myself up with a yell and lay in the dark, dazed, hearing voices miles off at the front of our

one-story bungalow. More people arrived; there was laughing in the walls; my door flashed open—someone hunting the bathroom—and went black again.

School let out for the summer. My brother and I opened a Kool-Aid stand, raspberry only, mixed in a rusty bucket with grassblades and ants floating on the surface; we cleared four cents and served the rest free, making enemies of the customers who had paid. In the hot afternoons we were put to bed for a nap and then waked blowzy and peevish at three o'clock. Still blinking, dressed in fresh seersucker sunsuits, we went right away barefooted down the hot sidewalk to see LaVerne Mullens, an enormous girl who lived on our block and could do anything—talk dirty, climb trees like a bobcat, touch her nose with her tongue.

We mainly adored LaVerne, but we also went because of the colored cook named Bay, who had warts all over her face and sometimes pus in her eyes, signs of a witch. Her name was really Vashti Wimberly, shortened to Bay: "You take a name like Vashti, caint nobody remember it."

She was very hard to talk to. "They was a man used to come to our church," Bay said, "name of Jack Alamo, but he died."

"What happened, Bay?" asked my brother.

Bay pressed a butterbean shell until it split open with a little cluck and three shiny beans tumbled into a blue china bowl in her lap. After a while, I stamped my bare foot on the linoleum. "Bay, what *happened?"*

Haughty and slow, she rolled a big eye at me, a little pus at the corner. "What happened to who?"

LaVerne said, inhaling deeply, exasperated: "Jack Alamo. *Honestly!"*

"He died," Bay said, tired of the subject. "He was a man used to come to our church." It was no use asking her any questions. She finished the beans and went heavily to the sink. Her back to us, running cold water over her brown hands, Bay said, "This Jack Alamo was a mean man. He stop comin to our Sunday night meetins. And one night—"

Silence. "Yes, Bay?" I said. My heart began to kick like hind-legs as my special subject came up.

She set down the china bowl and stared past us with her diseased eyes. "It was three o'clock in the mornin. It was so dark you

couldn't see your hand. Jack Alamo was all by hisself, and he look out, and there was the death angel comin after him and snatch him right down thoo the floor, without him havin a chance to yell or nothin."

I stayed calm. I knew from LaVerne that Bay was a Baptist and you didn't have to believe a word they said. After thinking it over, LaVerne said scornfully, "But Bay, how do you know?"

"How does I know what?"

"I mean, if he didn't have time to yell, how'd anybody ever find out what happened to him?"

"Who, child?" said Bay.

"Oh, come on, what's the use of talking to her?" LaVerne said. "Let's climb up and stomp on the roof some, want to?"

"You better not, Miss Smarty," said Bay.

"Wee-wee and dog-mess on you, Bay!" LaVerne cried with splendor. She lifted her eyebrows in weary nonchalance: "But, maybe we won't. I'd just as soon go skin the cat." While LaVerne tied herself in knots on the backyard trapeze, I made my brother push me in the swing until I was too sick to push him in return. Then I lay down on the grass by a trellis of Paul Scarlet roses and watched the clouds and high birds wheeling past in a deep sky if you fell off into it you would keep falling forever. The summer was forever, St. Anne's School was far off as Hell, and we didn't have anything to worry about but infantile paralysis and kidnappers. LaVerne hung by her knees for a while with her skirt over her face. Then she joined me on the grass and told where babies came from. They fell out while you sat on the potty, and many were drowned; LaVerne always looked before flushing but Buddy and I needn't waste our time, she said.

"I never saw such three little whiny-cats," said Bay, when the summer had stretched and dried out to August. "Why don't you chillun go play and let Bay fix supper?" We had given up all hope of kidnappers, the bottom had fallen out of the Kool-Aid racket, we knew how to do everything on the trapeze. It was hot. The leaves hung completely still on the dull trees outside, and nobody new had moved on our block the whole summer.

"I sometimes wish school would start," LaVerne said.

"Not me," said I. "I'm gonna run away and never come back, except I'll sneak home in the middle of the night sometime and look in the window to see how everybody is." It nearly broke my solemn heart to hear myself say this, for I wasn't adventurous. "Will you be sorry when I'm gone, Buddy?" I asked my brother. He was a

happy-natured little boy, but obliging as butter, and so he at once stuck out his lip and began to cry. I went around the table and took one of his pink hands. "All right, then, I won't go."

"You already said you would," LaVerne insisted. "Now if you don't you're a storyteller and you'll burn your guts out in Hell. First your eyeballs will melt and run down your face, and then your tongue'll fry like a piece of liver, you'll break out in runny blisters all over, and the devil will jerk out your heart and eat it, munch munch munch munch—"

"Hush up, you ninnies," said Bay when I started to howl and Buddy joined in to keep me company.

"—munch munch munch—"

Bay banged for order with an eggbeater on the drainboard. "Oh, I'm sick of the whole world and everybody in this stinking neighborhood!" hollered LaVerne in conclusion. "Why doesn't anything happen?" In a frenzy she crossed her eyes and swiped at her nose with her tongue.

Bay pulled up her skirt. We quieted down abruptly, as we saw a little doll hanging on her mammoth thigh like a papoose, its body inside her stocking and the face peeping over her green garter. She pulled it out, dislodging also a policy-ticket which she tucked back into safekeeping. She held the doll out our reach, while we crowded around. "Now, what's that crazy thing?" said LaVerne suspiciously.

It was a black woman, no taller than a popsicle stick, arms sticking straight out from her shoulders. On the crude head, the painted eyebrows slanted downward made the red smile ferocious. "It's a gri-gri doll I bought for you off the gri-gri woman," Bay said.

"Is it to eat?" said Buddy.

Bay wrinkled away a fly that was visiting one of her warts. "It's to wish on. They aint but three wishes on it, so don't throw away your luck."

"I get first wish," I said. "We're company."

LaVerne said, "I'm first. Bay works for us, not yall."

"Whichever, you got to go face the sunset," said Bay. "If I let yall have it, will you clear out of my kitchen?" She handed the doll to me. As we filed out into the yard, Bay called through the window. "Don't all wish at once, it's like to blow a fuse. Just one wish a day."

I said, "Maybe I'll wish for a castle of gold and silver." I added, "I-didn't-mean-it, I-didn't-mean-it, I was just practising."

"Oh, you didn't *believe* that warty old Baptist?" said LaVerne.

She snatched the doll and threw it over by the rose trellis. "Come swing me."

"Of course I didn't," I said maturely. While I pushed LaVerne, Buddy went after the doll. He tasted its face with the tip of his tongue and sat down on the grass. LaVerne's long violent legs, kicking for momentum, swung over his head.

"What's her name?" Buddy asked. Nobody bothered to answer. He cradled the doll to his breast and said, "Her name's Nana Shellbean." He tried the name to various tunes. "Nana Shellbean, Nana Shellbean."

LaVerne suddenly sprang out of the swing, which flew backward crookedly, chains twisting and clattering. Concerned with her rights, she grabbed the doll from Buddy, spun around and glared at the sun. "Hocus pocus abracadocus, Nana Shellbean, if you're such hot stuff bring me a new green dress just like my good one." She flung the doll at Buddy and jumped back on the swing. "Push me some more."

"But I wanted to wish," my brother complained. "I was all ready."

You'll just have to wait till tomorrow," said LaVerne. "It's my yard." The sun went down behind the garage. When our mother called us home to supper over the back fences, Buddy buried Nana Shellbean in loose clods at the foot of the roses. I took his hand and we went down LaVerne's gravel driveway together. Out front, tall fathers in seersucker suits, let out of the orange bus at the corner, were walking up the sidewalk under the tala trees with the falling orange light on their faces.

Next morning at the Mullens house Bay ran the whining vacuum cleaner while LaVerne sat alone at breakfast. She said her parents had gone away for the day. I said, "Maybe that means you'll get your wish."

"What wish?" She ripped a piece of toast.

"They always bring something—maybe it'll be a new green dress."

LaVerne said, "Yaa-aa," showing some chewed egg on her tongue ready to be swallowed. At the thought that she could do as she pleased today, LaVerne went to her room and came slowly back in her good dress, which usually she wore only to birthday parties and church. This dress, of green organdy, with a big sash, made LaVerne queer. You could say anything, she wouldn't hit you; she wouldn't chase or hang on the trapeze; she moved like a spook. We followed her out into the sunshine. "I'm queen of the whole world," she let

us know on the front walk. "I don't have any mother and daddy and I'm perfectly beautiful." Alone in the world, she hunched up her shoulders around her neck and held her skirt out with both hands. She crooned and began to twirl, greedily watching the way her dress puffed out into a lime-colored bell. Faster, "Ee—ee—ee!" she went, over the grass with the wet still on it, to the driveway where she unexpectedly fell with a noise of tearing.

I thought, Hurry before she gets up. Her face bulged. She bobbed up from the gravel to hit somebody, but when she saw her skinned knee bleeding on a sagging loop of torn hem she sat down with a roar, right on the gravel, and threw a handful of pebbles instead. From behind a cape jasmine bush with fat dark leaves, I called bleakly, "Think of Nana Shellbean." I broke off a white flower that didn't have any brown ruined spots and threw it on the grass for her.

"Shut up, you little skunk!" More gravel pattered on the leaves.

"Well," I said, "well, they still might bring you another one."

Late that afternoon we sat on the grass, silent. LaVerne opened and snapped shut, opened and snapped shut, a black tin box of watercolors, the good kind with eight colors instead of four, brought by her parents. She threw it against the garage. "It's Bay's fault. I hope she goes to Hell," said LaVerne. Her face darkened; tears rolled down her freckles. She sat cross-legged and sobbed. We couldn't do her any good. When I said she would get a dress sometime she would like better than the green one, she picked her nose inconsolably and cried harder.

Buddy got tired of her. With a glance at the sun he went to unearth the doll. He began: "Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost and Nana Shellbean—"

I grabbed it from him. "Look, don't cry, LaVerne. Look. I wish I'd lose my fifty-cent piece. How about that? I wish I'd lose it and be even with you." This made LaVerne stop crying and look up with a gleam.

My brother was unhappy, though. "I wanted to wish. I was all ready to."

"You'll just have to wait," I said. "You're the littlest." On the way home, when his lip was still stuck out against me, I said, "Don't be mad. It doesn't work anyway. I just said it to make her feel good." My fifty-cent piece from our grandfather was safe at home in my Japanese box.

After supper there was an hour till bedtime for hide-and-seek.

Up and down the neighborhood there were frayed holes in hedges, packed-down places at the back of flowerbeds. There were polished footholds in the crotches of the easy trees. A street that may have looked new to grownups driving past in cars had so many worn out spots all over it that we needed dusk to make the game go.

I was a good hider. Holding out my fists with eight others while LaVerne counted-potatoes to settle who was It, I had in mind the Drunk Man's garage. The Drunk Man had forbidden us to set foot in his yard. Usually we contented ourselves with transporting examples of dog-mess, fastidiously wrapped in leaves, and laying them on his lawn as war-offerings. Tonight I'd seen him walk off with his wife toward the movies. We scattered. I shook Buddy off and went a back way, over fences, to the white garage.

There I wriggled under the Drunk Man's car and waited. The garage slowly grew dark; it was too good a hiding-place. I moved after a while and jumped with fright when I put my hand in something thick and wet. Blood. I licked my hand and tasted car oil. As I rubbed my hand on the floor to get it off, my fingers sent a coin scudding across the cement. I reached out again. Trying to think what this could mean, I heard a far-off voice calling, "All that's out, come in free," and I crawled out with the fifty-cent piece in my blackened hand.

I said I'd found it in some bushes, afraid that if the truth got back to the Drunk Man he might stagger down to our house demanding his money back. Anger made LaVerne speechless. Buddy's eyes were big with tomorrow's wish. I dropped the second fifty-cent piece into my Japanese box and climbed into bed, shocked, almost sick, like when I touched a brown leaf and it flew up in my face a brown moth. I hadn't expected Nana Shellbean to be alive. Worse, she moved in some cross, haywire way. I lay awake thinking about her out-of-control power: something bad might happen tomorrow, if my brother didn't wish just right.

I would advise him. I tried to think of a good wish for Buddy. Then I sat up in bed. Three wishes: who said the same person couldn't wish twice? I went to sleep resolved to steal my brother's wish, for everybody's safety.

I didn't have to be waked up from my nap the next afternoon. I hadn't shut my eyes. On LaVerne's kitchen table stood three glasses of grape juice beside a plate of warm yellow brown-edged cookies. While we drank, Bay went slowly about the rites of supper. Dread

made me quiet, as the time approached. I held a bite of cookie on my tongue and disintegrated it with a swallow of grape juice. As compensation for what I was about to do, I had given Buddy my silver to play with, and he was chinking the pieces against each other. I elevated my royal-colored drink against the sun from the window, held it near my eye, and watched Bay wade silently through the purple.

Buddy tipped up his glass until the ice-cubes hit him in the nose. With a prolonged noise he sucked the last purple-stained sugar from the bottom into his mouth. He got down from his chair. I said, "Where you going?"

"I'm gonna go do my wish."

I said, "I'll come with you." LaVerne jeered and stayed behind to wolf down the cookies. In the yard, still not sure, I said, "You know how it works?"

"It comes out opposite, that's all," said my brother.

I shoved him down on the grass and ran to claw up the doll from the rose bed. After a moment's astonishment, Buddy called for help. Running down the driveway I cut my foot on a stone and heard Buddy crying, "LaVerne, he took it away from me. I wanted to wish." Bay called my name through the kitchen window. My brother cried, "Please come back. It's not fair. Please," in a voice that would have made anyone cry with pity who wasn't running so fast.

LaVerne burst out the front door of her house. I ran straight to the end of our block and out into Shepherd Drive, a street with heavy traffic we were forbidden to cross. I saw headlights and leering metal grill; a horn blew in my ear. I thought I was killed, but I was across the street. People were yelling out the windows of stopped cars, LaVerne and Buddy were hopping and yelling on the opposite curb. I took the doll in both hands and stared into the heart of the afternoon sun until it turned black. As I closed my burned eyes, I remembered to wish opposite. "I wish—" I still didn't know what, until I heard my loud voice: "Nana Shellbean, make the world come to an end."

I opened my eyes, unable to see anything but a black disk. I felt peaceful. I think I dropped the used-up doll in the gutter and crossed the street. LaVerne slugged me. I felt my cut foot for the first time. Buddy was crying. I felt marvellous. We went home.

In the kitchen, Bay was washing the glasses we had drunk from. She turned to hear the testimony against me. When LaVerne and

Buddy were out of news and beginning to repeat themselves, Bay ignored LaVerne's tumult of Shepherd Drive traffic noises. Over their heads, she said to me in a quiet voice: "Why did you steal your brother's wish, devil?"

"I had to, Bay. He'd a just wasted it. I didn't wish just for me."

Bay kept on looking at me. "What'd you wish?"

I babbled under her dark gaze. "I found out how it works, Bay. It comes out opposite of what you wish. I wished the most awful thing in the world to happen, so's it'll come out the best.

Bay's brown, flat face didn't change. "I've heard that people that laughs and don't bleeve in the gri-gri has they wish come out that way," she said, "opposite. You gets your wish when you bleeve."

After a pause, I gave a desolate laugh. "Well, good thing I don't believe. Ha ha."

Said Bay, "You bleeved enough to do your pore little brother outa his rights. That much you bleeved. Get your evil wish now and serve you right, Mr. Smarty." She put her hand on Buddy's curls and he hid his face in her apron. She said, "There, honey, don't you cry just cause you got a mean, no-count brother."

LaVerne looked curiously at my eyes. "What'd you wish for anyway, nut-head?"

"I didn't wish anything. Who believes that crazy stuff?"

"I do and you do, that's who," Bay said mercilessly.

"Oh, let me alone, can't you?" I yelled. I went outside and down the driveway more slowly this time, limping on my sore foot. In front, the sun was now burning rich and low above the trees, and their shadows began to inch like snakes over the grass toward our houses. I tried how long I could look at the sun without blinking, as if it could shine right through my eyes into my head and burn out what I knew. "I don't believe it at all." I said with a chuckle, "I don't a bit," like a worm telling himself he could bend some other way than the hook curved.

My father picked a switch from the hedge before supper, skinned the leaves off with his fingers, and stung my legs for running into Shepherd Drive. I cried a little out of custom, but I didn't feel it much. We sat down to supper. The yellow sun came through the windows and lit the silver and clean glasses of ice-water with its last light. I dolefully rearranged my mashed potatoes and made a cavity in the broccoli that looked like bites. My father reached out a gentle, square hand and mussed my hair. "Come on, fella, you want to grow

up to be a big man, don't you?" At his touch, I wanted to warn them. Then I grew hard and distant: if I told them I was the one responsible for the world coming to an end, I would get switched again. The truth would come out soon enough. I sat quiet as a little bottle of poison and let my mother feel my forehead.

Outside, the west burned down. The light softened, and as the dusk filled up the trees and bushes, crickets began singing. At LaVerne's, we stepped in wet flowerbeds and squeezed mud through our toes for a while. Then we sat down on the sidewalk, which was still warm from the departed sun. Listening with one ear to LaVerne, something about dead people, I had my back to the end of our street and didn't see what my brother was watching. A light came over Buddy's face. He pointed behind me: "Look at the moon."

I turned and saw it over Shepherd Drive, huge, orange as Halloween, just above the roofs. It looked heavy and peculiar there. I'd never seen such a big moon before. LaVerne put her face close to my ear, and as if she could smell my brain, she was inspired to say in a soft, terrifying whisper: "Say, *that's* not the moon. The world's on fire."

I jumped up at once and dragged Buddy home over the damp lawns. Past my father, who was watering the grass, we scampered into the house. My mother put her fingers over the telephone receiver. "For heaven's sakes, boys, I'm talking."

We jumped up and down and bawled in chorus, "The world's on fire!"

"The world's on fire," she explained to the telephone. To us she said, "I'll be there in just a minute. Do be quiet."

Despair. We rushed to the bathroom and wee-weed to calm our nerves. She took forever on the phone. I passed the time by flushing the toilet repeatedly, thinking of the safe and drowned babies down the cool pipes. "Now, what is it?" my mother said when she found us crouched against the dark wall. She clicked the light on and moistened a washrag to mop our faces. "Who says the world's on fire?"

"LaVerne," said Buddy, with dwindled urgency.

"Come show me." She took us each by the hand and led us out on the front steps. It had grown dark. The full moon had sailed loose from the trees and turned pure white. My father looked up from coiling the hose. "Isn't it a wonderful night? What was all the uproar about?"

"I don't know," said my mother. Hushed, we hung on to her hand and looked up at the moon. The roof next door was silver, and moon-

light bathed all the lawns on our street. As we stood there, the globes of the street lights came on like music. My mother smiled down on us. "What did LaVerne say, boys?" I shook my head. With a monkey grin around her skirt at me, Buddy ran down the steps to turn somersaults of celebration all over the watered, silver grass before my mother could tell him to stop. She burst out laughing. "Oh, you little mess!" My father picked him up soaked and wriggling, slung him over his shoulder, and we all went into the house.

I didn't want to go to bed. "I have to stay up tonight. Please." While I insisted, my father buttoned my pajamas. My mother melted two aspirins with sugar in a teaspoonful of water. When my door closed, the moon flooded in and washed me to sleep before I could stop it.

A rat waited in the corner of my room. After a while, though my own eyes were shut, I felt the little yellow eyes watching. I lay still. Only the curtains moved, like black veils. As the rat was about to move toward the bed, something else moved in another corner; the rat paused to look that way, while I tried to guess what it was. It moved slowly, with a crippled, scraping sound. I said, "I'm not any good. You don't want me." Nevertheless, the second thing pulled itself forward into a pool of moonlight. It was a crab. I bunched my knees against my chest away from the edge of the mattress while it walked around on the floor. Then I remembered to pull the sheet out of reach of the exploring claws, but just too late, for it had caught hold and my pulling helped it up. I kicked the sheet away and exposed my sore foot, which the crab at once fastened to. "Devil!" the claws said. I yelped and sat up in bed. The moon was startled around to the other side of the house. I ran to the window. The world was still there.

I listened. A board in the house ticked once, there wasn't another sound. I dressed and started to go barefooted but stayed to buckle my sandals on, for my foot hurt. I unhooked the screen softly and let myself out the window into the hydrangea bed. It was too late to take a last look at my parents and brother—there was just time to start walking.

"O my God I am heartily sorry for having offended Thee, and I detest all my sins because I dread the loss of Heaven and the pains of Hell," I chattered as I picked my way down the dark driveway. ". . . offend Thee, who are tall, good, and deserving of all my love. I firmly dissolve with the help of Thy grace to confess my sins do penance and amend my life Amen."

I had expected to see the moon when I came around the house, but it had been taken away. The street-lamps cast a bone-white light on the faces of the houses. All the windows were mute. I went past LaVerne's house, and the Drunk Man's, and on to the corner, where I turned left without a backward look and walked along Shepherd Drive. The black trees stirred; the lamps threw splattered shadows on the sidewalk. I met a white dog, lonesome and mean, who smelled my legs. When I stroked his rough head, he laid his ears back and let me go on. Past him, I turned and whistled him to come along, but he kept going in his own direction and paid no mind. When a car passed, I hid behind a tree.

The parking-place at the shopping center, full of cars by daylight, was as deserted as the bald country of my dream. The unlit tower of the movie theatre rose to the black sky. Then, from behind a telephone pole, I caught sight of three bent figures sitting cross-legged on the sidewalk, in the shadow of the drugstore.

They made practised winding movements with their hands. Then the sound of string snapping came across the street; then they wound some more. Mesmerized, I came out of hiding and crossed the street as if their string reeled me in. When I got close enough to see, it came as a surprise to find people doing in the deep of night what I'd seen *Chronicle* boys do in the afternoons. The idea that the world went right on about its business while I slept made me forget why I'd started out.

"Jeezus, who are you?" said one of the paperboys, and the others looked up too. All three were quite old, with squinty gruff faces and oiled hair. They wore blue jeans and old shirts with the sleeves ripped off. The one who spoke reached for a paper off the stack and went on with his rhythmic work, rolling up the paper, wrapping string around it, throwing it aside, reaching for another, while I pronounced my entire name in answer to the question. "That don't tell me much," the paperboy said. "What brings you here, I meant."

"He's running away, is that it, kid?" asked the second paperboy.

I nodded. They wanted to know why. I said, "The world's coming to an end."

"Jeezus!" said the first with a hoarse laugh. He paused to study the headlines and resumed his work. "Who give you the news?"

"Oh, I heard it," I said casually, more interested in the deft fingers. The paperboy was barefooted, and I noticed that just like me he had cut his left foot, though no doubt more honorably. I said politely,

"How do you get to be a paperboy? It must be intristing."

"Yeah. Fascinating." He spat three feet out to the gutter. I was just learning how myself, and certainly admired a good spitter. The paperboy said, "Sit down. I'll show you—that is, if you got time." The other two snickered. From the canvas saddlebags on the back end of his bike he got a second ball of string. I sat down beside him; he wound in slow motion so I could follow. When my string didn't stay wound and my paper flopped open, he went on without me. Taking another from the stack, he dispatched it while I still toiled over my first one. He finished three more while I was carefully doing my second one. He said, "Jeezus, kid. Get a move on. That aint the Christmas issue." I looked up, mortified. He gave me a friendly jab. He looked so old and tough I was surprised when he grinned he had all his teeth. I worked faster.

The two others shoved off on their bicycles. When I'd helped pack his saddle-bags, my friend said, "Where you live, kid?"

"Branard Street, over that way."

"Sure, it's on my route. Hop on, I'll pump you home."

I climbed on the handlebars. As we sailed down Shepherd Drive in the breeze, "D'you do this every night?" I asked.

"Sure. Only, it aint night." He lifted one hand briefly from the handlebar to point out a low crack of grey on the sky. When he turned down Branard, I showed him my house.

"How old are you?" I asked.

"Thirteen."

"I'm practically eight. Can I come fold papers some more?"

"Any time, kid—if the world don't come to an end."

"I meant, if it don't."

"Sure."

I jumped down. "Thanks for the ride."

The boy rode off whistling and throwing papers. When he turned the corner I climbed a tala tree for a better look at the sky, startling some mockingbirds who flew to the hedge by the driveway and commenced singing. I climbed till the top branches gave with my weight; then, giddy and tingling, I looked at sleeping houses not only on my street but two beyond. To the north, the movie tower and drugstore. As I sat guarding, the milkman's horse turned on to the street from Shepherd Drive, pulling the red-and-white cart. Wonderful how the horse knew to go two houses and wait, while the man in white went up the first driveway with his wire basket of bottles.

Soon the horse clopped and snorted beneath the tree I sat in, while the milkman went to our back door. I picked one of the green tala berries, that bled sticky milk on my fingers as I waited. When the milkman was under me, I dropped it accurately on his neck. He flinched and looked up. It made me laugh when he clucked the horse on without spotting me, as if a green berry could fall by itself.

The street lights went out. The grey street was empty. Left alone, I shivered and got solemn again. I fixed my eyes on the sky, but when I tried to pray to God not to let something black come up instead of the sun, my lips were stiff. I watched. The ignorant birds sang louder, and green came into the grass. The bellies of the clouds flushed with yellow, and the brand-new edge of the old everyday sun came up over the roofs across Shepherd Drive. The leaves lit up all around me. When I held my hand up against the light, it shone right through my pink fingernails and showed me my blood. My fingertips were black with ink from the morning paper.

I sat in the tree another hour. The front door opened and my father came out in his robe. The paper was far out on the glistening grass. As he bent for it, I looked secretly right down on top of his head and thought how small he was. I began to laugh. When he looked up, puzzled, I laughed some more and made the branches wave. From the foot of the tree, he said, "Good morning, Tarzan. Would you be interested in some breakfast?" and I climbed down into his arms.

I ate two plates of hotcakes, during which nobody noticed my black fingers. As my father read the front page, I said, "What's in the paper this morning?" and screamed with laughter. My mother felt my forehead.

Buddy had waked up grumpy, with a big lower lip against me for yesterday. "I wanted to wish on Nana Shellbean," he said, pulling away when I hugged him in the front yard and tried to make up. "It wasn't fair." I was so full of secrets I didn't want money. I ran to my Japanese box and gave him one of my fifty-cent pieces to keep.

We sat on the front steps watching our father walk toward the bus stop. I said, "Where'd you get that crazy name anyway, Nana Shellbean?"

"Why, from the prayer in church," Buddy said confidently, as if it was an ignorant question.

I wrinkled my nose and gave him a suspicious squint. "What prayer?"

He recited: "In the name of the Father Son and Holy Ghost as it was in the beginning is now and Nana Shellbean—"

I burst in, "You loony, that's not how it goes." I made him repeat after me. He got it right once, but on a second try he slid back into his private version. I said racuously, "Jeezus, kid!"

He was scandalized. "Sister Mary Ruth says you're not sposed to take the name of the Lord in vain."

"Jeezus, I'll say anything I want to," I said. "Dog mess. Wee-wee." I spat on the sidewalk. Then I resumed the lesson. "In the name of the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost—"

"—as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. World without end, Amen," said Buddy in a disappointed voice. He'd liked it better the old way. "Let's go down to LaVerne's," he said.

"Aw, she acts so nutty all the time. She's just a silly girl."

He went, and I fooled around in the front yard by myself. I looked up and down our flat street. It would be a long time before I could be a paperboy yet. The sun burned down on the top of my head, too hard to look up at. The grass dried out as stiff under my feet as though there had never been dew on it. It was a hot, rude, endless day. The sidewalks were scorching. The grit sparked up in my narrowed eyes when I walked down to LaVerne's house after all, slowly: afraid I might miss something if I stayed away.

DUDLEY FITTS:

Five Poems from Martial

I AD QVINTVM IV: lxxij

Exigis ut donem nostros tibi, Quinte, libellos.
Non habeo, sed habet bibliopola Tryphon.
"Aes dabo pro nugis et emam tua carmina sanus?
non" inquis "faciam tam fatue." Nec ego.

TO QUINTUS, AS TO SO MANY OF MY FRIENDS

Each time I get out a new book of poems, Quintus,
you expect a free copy. Yet there are bookstores.

"What? Pay good money for the kind of stuff you write?
Do I look feeble-minded?"
No, Quintus. Do I?

II DE BASSO VIII: x

Emit lacernas millibus decem Bassus
Tyrias coloris optimi. Lucrifecit.
"Adeo bene emit?" inquis. Immo non solvit.

LE BON MARCHE

Basso's just bought
a particolored fur
overcoat,
purple with bright red but-
tons & a yellow collar.
Price? One grand. What
a bargain!
"Is that
what you call a bargain?"
You bet
your life!
He won't pay for it.

III IN ANVM DEFORMEM VII: lxxiv

Vis futui gratis cum sis deformis anusque;
res perridicula est: vis dare nec dare vis.

TO AN ELDERLY BUT STILL ENTHUSIASTIC LADY

Although you're old and uglier than a hake,
you still want to be had for nothing.

Wake

up!

At your age
a girl can't give without giving.

IV AD PAETVM XI: lxxix

Ad primum decima lapidem quod venimus hora
arguimur lentae crimine pigritiae.
Non est ista quidem, non est mea, sed tua culpa est,
misisti mulas qui mihi, Paete, tuas.

REMONSTRANCE

Pete, I admit I was late. It took me ten hours
to cover a mile. But the fault was yours, not mine.

Why did you lend me your car?

V IN PHOEBVM II: lxxxvij

Dicis amore tui bellas ardere puellas,
qui faciem sub aqua, Phoebe, natantis habes.

LOVE & KISSES

You claim that all the pretties are panting for you:
for you, Fitts,
with the face of a drowned clown drifting under water?

RICHARD FOSTER:

Narcissus as Pilgrim: Allen Tate

> "Sometimes I think that life is a dream, and that what I am really doing is not what I do."—Preface to *The Forlorn Demon*

I want here to characterize Allen Tate as the type of the man of letters in the modern world, a designation that he seems himself to have sanctioned in the title he gave to his most recent collection of essays, *The Man of Letters in the Modern World* (Meridian paperback, 1955). Consider all he has been: Southerner, expatriate (though as a Guggenheim Fellow, the time was right), reactionary, and traditionalist; editor, academician, novelist, biographer, and social commentator; and, above all, poet and critic. Recently he became also a Roman Catholic. Perhaps T. S. Eliot, who gave to our century the great completing gesture of conversion, is the archetype. But he has more exceptions: his is only a quasi-catholicism, and though he was a man of letters, he was also content to become a publishing executive, thus accepting the split in modern sensibility. And he has had to acquire his traditions. But Tate was born out of the very ashes of his tradition and in the very place of its conflagration. And he has not only all along kept *in* the modern world, whether it knew him or not, probing it everywhere in the excursions of his dialectic, but has sought engagement with it always in his sometimes heroic, sometimes almost tragically conceived capacity as man of letters.

Tate is less a technical critic than an essayist using literature as the frame of reference within which he writes about and to his time in the light of his notions of the proper ends of man. He is the twentieth-century humanist-intellectual, isolated and virtually unheard in the barbaric modern society whose larger deformities it is his concern to examine and minister to. But one can hardly fail to understand his essays also as the battleground of his personal decisions as an individual of the species he is here supposed to represent. I see him as a man of letters who has made through the modern world the typical pilgrimage in quest of certainty. Tate's individual direction has been, roughly, to move from the uncertain ideal of the agrarian Old South toward the orthodox actuality of the Church. He made his beginning in the historical idea of a particular "traditional" society

because, like the Church to which he finally came, it seemed to provide a myth, a form, a locus of integrity, at least a symbolic footing for the individual mind in a world whose modernity was constituted by intellectual and moral chaos. But this idea, itself the end of an implicit quest, was finally unequal to the forces of the modern chaos. To discover why is also to discover the principle of the necessity of the pilgrimage. Let us begin by understanding the forces as Tate has understood them.

In the preface to *Reason in Madness* Tate addressed himself to "a deep illness of the modern mind." The illness, which has continued to be the object of his critical scrutiny, was what Eliot had called "dissociation of sensibility," extended to the full range of modern life, until the traditional humane ideal of wholeness, whether in man's nature or in society, was fragmented into chaos, which could also look like tyranny. Following Maritain, Basil Willey, and others, Tate has assigned what is at least the typical cause of the illness to Descartes, who, Tate says, isolated "thought" from the rest of man's nature. Tate recognizes that since Descartes men have chosen more and more to locate their certainties exclusively in "reason" and its practical techniques, called "science." But the positivist-rationalist certainty, which is the characteristically modern one, Tate sees as chimeric and monstrous in that it violates by exclusion those higher potentialities of wholeness that make man's nature human.

We are familiar enough with Tate's anti-positivism, an intellectual aversion he shares with most of his fellow critics and humanists. But he shares it too, as they do, with the poets of the Romantic movement. In an essay on "Three Types of Poetry" Tate once proposed that after the seventeenth century the pragmatic motive, having separated itself from the rest of man's nature, secured its ascendency by making its very separateness more and more an accepted principle of thought and action. This meant an inevitable tyranny of means over ends, of fact over knowledge, of intellect over feeling. In revolt against this emergent tyranny of science and rationalism, the Romantics threw away the intellect, handed the feelings to the will, and turned the will, thus driven, irresponsibly loose upon nature. The result was a reactionary condition of mind and art cut loose from the possibility of wholeness and form in the highest sense.

In a remarkable pair of essays on Dante and Poe—and they should be read together—Tate has demonstrated through contrast the terminal consequences of the Romantic reaction. Dante is the artist of

wholeness, and Tate designates his sensibility—in which will, intellect, and feeling function in harmony—as the "symbolic imagination." The symbolic imagination finds in the world of sense and feeling a direction toward a world of idea and spirit, and the symbol it creates is an event of both in simultaneity. Dante's *Divine Comedy* is an action as symbolic discovery: "The symbolic imagination conducts an action through analogy, of the human to the divine, of the natural to the supernatural, of the low to the high, of time to eternity." But if Dante is the poet of this sort of symbolic action, Poe is the poet of rapt stasis. His is the last condition of the Romantic reaction in which nature itself, the arena where will is translated into action and intellect into thought, is finally abandoned. Poe is the ultimate expression of what Tate calls the "angelic imagination," which feels itself "quasi-divine" and "tries to disintegrate or circumvent the image in the illusory pursuit of essence." The Me triumphs over the Not-Me, and the Romantic excess that D. H. Lawrence called the sin of "*self*-consciousness" issues in an art and philosophy conditioned by a monstrous solipsism. Tate says of *Eureka,* Poe's formulation of his "metaphysic," that here "every man *is* God: every man the non-spatial center into which the universe, by a reverse motion of atoms, will contract, as into its annihilation." "Poe as God," Tate writes, "sits silent in darkness."

I would guess that Mr. Tate might quarrel with the use I am about to make of his essay. For he would expect us, I think, to understand Poe only analogically, to translate Poe's yearning for "pure" intellect into the circumstances of our own time as a warning against the direct effects on thought and sensibility of the ubiquitous sciences, and their indirect cultural effect in, as he describes the theme of his own famous "Ode," "the cut-off-ness of the modern 'intellectual man'" from his modern acquisitive society. But as D. H. Lawrence demonstrated again and again, and as Tate also seems to have recognized, what one intends to say and think is not always the same thing as what one has "really" thought and said. Tate concludes his essay on Poe and the "Angelic Imagination" with this warning: "We shall be so exhausted in our liberty that we shall have to take up our final rest, not in the cool of the evening, but in the dark, if any one of our modes decides to set up in business for itself." I think it most relevant to understand this warning to the modern man of letters in the light of its simplest and most obvious relation to Poe. And that is as a warning to him, as he defends the arts and the

whole mind against the onslaught of science and the merely rational mind, to resist not only the half-life of an autotelic positivism, but even more its opposite—the solipsistic life-in-death of intellectual inversion.

So we must see the man of letters, then, as flanked dangerously by two opposed chimeras of certainty, two opposed forces of the chaotic modern world that he perceives. The first of them, positivism, Tate has unmistakably kept clear of. But the second—and, for the man of letters, perhaps inherently the more seductive—has been sometimes harder for him to recognize.

Like the other New Critics, Tate has from the beginning opposed the spirit of romanticism. He has been acutely aware of its dangers to mind as a virtually reflexive gesture of reaction, whether against the traditional past or the positivist present. In an early essay on "Confusion and Poetry" Tate astutely observed that the contention between the "Romantic" critics (he named Van Wyck Brooks, Mencken, Mumford, Spingarn, and the "very young" followers of guerilla Carlos Williams) and the New Humanists was no real contention between tradition and contemporaneity or between morality and reality, but rather between rival romanticisms. The two groups, he wrote, were fundamentally the same in that they had both given "allegiance to a single order of values by making a religion of literature"; and he found the only real opposition in a few "skeptical and searching" critics like John Crowe Ransom. I suppose we may understand Tate too as at that time a critic skeptical and searching in much the same sense, by conviction and temperament certainly, as well as by his official loyalties to the Agrarians, *The Fugitive,* and his former mentor, Mr. Ransom. And so he has been since, as his titles tell us: *Reactionary Essays, Reason in Madness,* and, if we understand the allusion, *The Forlorn Demon.*

But the reaction has been fierce, and the reason darkly interested. Miss Kathleen Nott has observed, I think with unfair cleverness, that Tate "wrote poems about not being scientific in a way which reminds one of Wordsworth writing poems about writing poetry." Alfred Kazin wrote more truly in *On Native Grounds* that "what one saw in his work was a rage, so profound and superior a hatred of science and positivism, not to say democracy, that it was almost too deep for words." "Furious" and "rage" were words that once came naturally too to R. P. Blackmur in reviewing a volume of Tate's poetry; but also "form," which Blackmur saw was being imposed by

the poems upon the "chaos" of the reality the poet perceived. One of the major forms envisioned by Tate has been the idea of the traditional society as tragically because imperfectly realized by the Old South.

The idea of the traditional society was the motif of the fierce reaction and the critical reason both, and, to keep intact the metaphor this essay has been building on, it represented imaginatively the ideal end of the man of letters' pilgrimage through the modern world. To Tate a "traditional society" has meant one whose economy functioned to support a coherent and perpetuable moral code. He envisioned it as a feudal or semi-feudal society rooted in the soil of a particular place and corrected by a universal community of values of which it is a local part. The idea of the "classical-Christian world," Tate has written, was "based upon the regional consciousness, which held that honor, truth, imagination, human dignity, and limited acquisitiveness, could alone justify a social order however rich and efficient. . . ." The agrarian Old South was only a partial realization of this ideal, and its defects—its failures of religion and art particularly, and the cataclysm of the War—gave it a special piquancy as a symbol: "The South," Tate observed in an essay on "The Profession of Letters in the South," "has had reverses that permit her people to imagine what they might have been. (And only thus can people discover what they *are*.)"

In the same essay, first published in 1935, Tate, as a Southerner and man of letters, examined the Old South's failure to achieve a high literary culture. But the essay suggests a conception of what might have been, which almost becomes a plea to recreate and maintain in the present an actual regional identity in Southern writing, even in publishing. Similarly, in the essay on "Religion and the Old South," originally published in 1930 in *I'll Take My Stand,* Tate's analysis of the Old South's religious failure adumbrated both a social ideal and a personal imperative. His thesis was that the South had lacked a contributing feudal religion to complement its agrarian-feudal social structure. The tone of its religion was "protestant," with which Tate associated the supposed abstractionist-materialist character of the Northern mind. The Southern mind, deprived of an appropriate religion, was forced into a narrower matrix than the Southern society as a "traditional" or "whole" society promised to evolve. As a consequence, the South expressed itself only through politics—which was "abstractionist" in the Northern fashion. Tate asked himself at the end of the essay how the Southerner now can

get hold of his tradition. His answer was, "By violence." It had to be "by violence" because beneath the historical tradition there had been no real and surviving religion for him to fall back on; and "violence" meant the abstraction of an essentially political faith—a faith in reaction, in a return to the feudal-agrarian form of society symbolized by the Old South. "The Southerner is faced with a paradox," Tate wrote in conclusion: "He must use an instrument, which is political, and so unrealistic and pretentious that he cannot believe in it, to reestablish a private, self-contained, and essentially spiritual life. I say that he must do this, but that remains to be seen."

Alfred Kazin has compared Tate's Old South to the Marxist's Russia of the thirties, as "an ideal embodied in a culture, a community to be used as a standard of order and fellowship against the Enemy." But the great difference was that Russia, however much its actuality violated the Marxist's ideal, was alive and available as a symbol, while Tate's South was dead. It is in fact a ghostly South that, especially in Tate's poetry, hovers with restless irony about the present perceived by the poet as wasteland or nightmare. Tate has written of Poe, "If he was a madman he was also a gentleman." It may be. But real madness is a nightmare chaos that no mere imaginatively or aesthetically conceived form can long contain. And certainly the manners and morals of the gentleman, the pattern of the social forms and values that we associate with the idea of "civilization," did not very importantly condition Poe's art. If we may once again find implications in the Poe analogy, perhaps one of them will be that the deeply felt revulsion against positivist modernity that we have come to know as the Romantic reaction is similarly too deep and intense to be checked and formed by a secular faith in the idea of a traditional society.

In 1945 Tate published an essay called "The New Provincialism." I should like to make it represent here a kind of leave-taking of that secular faith, formulated fifteen years earlier at the end of the essay on "Religion and the Old South." "The New Provincialism" was written during the Second World War, under the shadow of its violence and in the light of the emerging democratic philosophy of One World. The last remnants of the old orders were being destroyed (compare Tate's poem "To Our Young Proconsuls of the Air"), and the One World destined to arise was universal in space but temporally provincial in its total severance from the past. Tate marked the First World War as bringing the South back into the

modern world. Then came the "Southern renascence," which, as a "backward glance," produced "a literature conscious of the past in the present," a literature informed by the tension between the fact of a chaotic present and the idea of an ordered traditional past. But now it was as if even that provisional secular faith could no longer survive. "From now on," he concluded, "we are committed to seeing *with,* not *through* the eye: we, as provincials who do not live anywhere." Poe as artist had had no status in his society, no established profession of letters to enable him to nurture in his art whatever there was in him of the intelligence and civilization of the gentleman. Tate as man of letters had been similarly isolated, and now even the staying symbol of the Old South, itself a kind of talisman against the demon of romanticism, seemed to have been swept away by these newest eruptions of the modern chaos.

A traditionalist without a tradition, an absolutist without absolutes, a religious sensibility without a religon—what could such a man be but a version of romantic? Tate's romanticism has been commented upon in recent years by several writers. Vivienne Koch, for example, has found the original classicism of his poetry giving way more and more to a romantic quality that reaches its climax in "Seasons of the Soul." Another writer has seen in the more recent criticism an "almost Emersonian mysticism," and still another heard in Tate's interpretation of Longinus "the language of the metaphysical idealist, especially Hegel and Croce." A surprising language to find there, since Tate had once spoken with some contempt of the high-sounding "slogans" of art that the Humanists and "romantic" critics had lifted from Croce and the nineteenth-century Germans, among others. This was in "Confusion and Poetry," where, it will be remembered, Tate had disapproved of the same critics for making, in the way of romantics, a religion of literature.

Tate has continually declared against quasi-religions of art, and against Matthew Arnold, whom he apparently regards as the official sponsor of them for our century. Yet these declarations have had the interesting quality also of perhaps partly conscious and vividly relevant *self*-criticism. For Tate himself can be understood as a maker of art into religion. Alfred Kazin has accused him of turning literature into a series of "isolated ectasies," in order to save it from science: "Only the poem remained, and its incommunicable significance; and before it the critic worshipped as at a mystic shrine, since it was all human knowledge and all spiritual insight." Professor

Francis Roellinger showed some years ago that Arnold's theory of poetry, which Tate had so vigorously attacked in his essay on "Poetry as Knowledge" for giving poetry's case away to the sciences, was in the last analysis "not very much different from Mr. Tate's." And Mr. Monroe Spears, editor of *The Sewanee Review* and an admirer of Tate's, has found that this knowledge that poetry was supposed to be, looked strangely like "the contemplation or vision or revelation of absolute truth sought usually in philosophy and religion." Tate, he says, seemed at times to be "making art a substitute for religion," which results not in a doctrine of art for art's sake, but of "life for art's sake."

The characterization is right enough. But I should prefer it "art for life's sake" to enforce the Arnoldian likeness that, for all his denials, has been implicit in Tate's view of poetry. The difference from Arnold is one first of tone: where Arnold is respectable, journalistic, and traditionally humane, Tate is tragic, cryptic, mystic; and second of verbal technicalities: where Arnold distinguishes "idea" from mere fact, Tate distinguishes "knowledge." And both alike attribute to poetry the higher thing distinguished. In a very early essay called "Poetry and the Absolute" (1927), Tate reported his allegiance to Aristotelian metaphysics and poetics and his opposition to "Romantic German aesthetics through Hegel," which dissolved the concrete experience of poetry into the absolute Absolute. Tate's proposition was that poetry had nothing to do with the absolute-as-substance of metaphysics, but was instead "absolute experience"—meaning, I take it, experience "in itself," unique, unreferential, intransitive.[1] (Is not this something like the view of Ransom, who was, of course, nurtured on "Romantic German aesthetics through Hegel"?) Though Tate attempted to banish the mists of German aesthetics by invoking the weighty name of Aristotle, what threatened to loom up in their place, in spite of the philosophical jargon, was the spectral exoticism of Wilde and Pater. Tate has never reprinted this callow essay. But it is a useful specimen of the beginnings of Tate's actual romanticism of thought, and helps to explain why in the end, beyond the deep and unforgettable individuality of his rage, his work would finally exhibit a romantic enthusiasm like Coleridge's supported by a romantic moralism like Arnold's.

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[1] Monroe Spears, in his study of Tate's criticism (*Sewanee Review*, 1949), has interpreted this essay a little differently and a little more generously than I have.

At many points in his essays one could almost imagine that Tate consciously set out to complete the work that the romanticisms of Arnold and Coleridge failed at. Arnold's attempted exaltation of poetry as increasingly the "consolation and stay" of "the spirit of our race," Tate finishes by returning to poetry the rights to "knowledge" that Arnold was supposed to have signed away to the sciences in such essays as the one on "Literature and Science." And when, in "The Man of Letters in the Modern World," Tate asks of "the letter of the poem, the letter of the politician's speech, the letter of the law," "Is there in this language genuine knowledge of our human community—or the lack of it—that we have not had before?" he does for the imagination what Coleridge, its most famous philosophic partisan, was ultimately unable to do. He performs an act of recognition of the imagination as the unifying power not only of artistic creation, but also of man's total life as a spiritual and social being. Tate has glorified in similar fashion the activity of the critic. Criticism, he has written, expressing through metaphors of mystic intensity an Arnoldian emphasis on the importance of the critical faculty, occupies a "middle position between imagination and philosophy," which makes it "perpetually impossible. Like a man it is nothing in itself; criticism, like man, embraces pure experence or exalts pure rationality at the price of abdication of its dual nature." Or, to put it another way,—and I assume the obviousness of the image Tate has here provided of the man of letters' difficult sojourn between two chimeras of modernist certainty—at the price of the freedom, as well as of the sanity, which is implicit in the idea of an uncommitted and skeptical intelligence.

Since it is as critic, as a voice of "reason" amid the modern madness, that the artist becomes the man of letters, I think Tate's conception of criticism and the critic is of special importance in this interpretation of him as an unmistakeable, if reluctant, romantic. Tate has pictured the ideal criticism in a chaotic time as the expression of a "whole" and traditionally formed mind intellectually detached from the present. And I suppose for him its exemplar, besides the "skeptical and searching" Mr. Ransom of Tate's relative youth, would be T. S. Eliot. Such a criticism does the work neither of "reason" nor of feeling and intuition, but of "intelligence," which involves both. At its best, he has told us in his note on "The Critic's Business," it is no more nor less than "the ordering of original insights and . . . passing them on, through provisional frames of reference, to other

persons secondhand." It should be noted that this detached critical intelligence holds off explicitly from all limiting critical dogmas and methodologies, and implicitly too from the larger dogmas, social and spiritual, that would seek to compel literature into becoming an instrument of something else. This recalls Arnold's continual emphasis on the necessary "disinterestedness" of criticism. But from the art of literature, the critical intelligence must move into the broader human issues; for literary standards, Tate has observed, "in order to be effectively literary, must be more than literary." And this should recall not only T. S. Eliot, but also Arnold, who believed that criticism dealt with the best that has been thought and said in the world, with the "criticism of life," which is more than a matter of art.

I am trying to suggest that the critical intelligence hypostatized by Tate, with the breadth of work that he assigns it, requires and desires, as the romantic mind does, both freedom and certainty. The word "intelligence" presumes to justify the man of letters' keeping free of commitment to any of the formulas of the modern world, whose fragmentation and dehumanization, measured against his vision of the coherent and traditional society, reveal no enabling pattern for full human realization. But it presumes also to reassure by suggesting a sufficient wholeness and certainty of mind—what in much lesser contexts might be called "good sense"—to save him from capsizing in a gust of reaction.

But in spite of the reasonable-sounding rhetoric, the actual position of Tate's man of letters looks untenably paradoxical. Let me quote something strikingly relevant to the point at issue that Tate wrote more than a quarter-century ago in the essay on "Confusion and Poetry." He had then discovered the New Humanists caught in a telling intellectual dilemma: they desired authority at the same time they desired "freedom from the traditional sources of moral judgment as these came down to us in living institutions like the church. . . ." Their solution, he wrote, was to make "a vague mixture of classical and Christian authors" into their missing traditional or institutional "authority." A solution, is it not, like Tate's own humane critical "intelligence," like Arnold's knowing the best that has been thought and said, and even like Wordsworth's and Coleridge's intuition, which bypasses the discursive books to go straight to the natural vessels of Truth? The solution is a romantic solution, and the end it looks toward is the angelized intellect of Poe, where without either nature or light "thought" is its own object, its own sub-

stance, its own structure. Some words of Tate's own, abducted into my special context here, supply exactly the suggestive application I wish to make about Tate's position as the man of letters who does not live intellectually anywhere in the modern world. Here are the disturbing last sentences of "Our Cousin, Mr. Poe":

> Mr. Poe tells us in one of his simple poems that from boyhood he had "a demon in my view." Nobody then—my great-grandfather, my mother, three generations—believed him. It is time we did. I confess that his voice is so near that I recoil a little, lest he, Montressor, lead me into the cellar, address me as Fortunato, and wall me up alive. I should join his melancholy troupe of the undead, whose voices are surely as low and harsh as the grating teeth of storks. He is so close to me that I am sometimes tempted to enter the mists of pre-American genealogy to find out whether he may not actually be my cousin.

Let us come back into the element of our discourse and direct the force of these metaphors upon the man of letters as a free-floating humanistic intelligence scrutinizing, in the capacity of critic, the discontinuous, dehumanized modern world. What is this intelligence that he would exercise? And how would we know it from a possibly Satanic intelligence? And when it acted critically, would we be committed to accept those "insights" that come from it labeled as products of a free, unmethodological and undogmatized mind? What *is* an "insight"? How is it different from a logical conclusion or an empirical observation? And how could we tell it from a whim, an error, a lie?

These are rhetorical questions. But they represent, I think, very real problems, unless we are going to take Tate's critical discourse as merely a lifework of idle rhetoric. The man of letters makes assertions about important matters—about literature, yes, but also about values generally, about life, about "reality." He engages with philosophical questions by his own choice, and if we take any stock in the answers he gives, "provisional" or not, we must care how well they meet the tests of experience, of logic, or even of received dogmas. To care may be our only protection, for all we know, against a philosophic madness, or a Poeish descent into the romantic maelstrom, or a hopeless entombment by Montressor as critic.

What suggests itself first is Tate's doctrine that poetry is knowledge. But this particular doctrine—an "insight," I suppose, since I have not found it discussed, argued, analyzed in Tate's criticism, but

only repeatedly affirmed—has been too often questioned to warrant further treatment here. We have a fresher specimen of his thought in an essay disturbingly titled "Is Literary Criticism Possible?" This sounds like a weighty question. Tate is a critic, and we see from his other writings that he holds criticism to be of considerable importance as a citadel of civilization in the modern world. Furthermore, the literary question seems to involve still deeper epistemological ones. Yet in posing this apparently vital question about criticism, which is in the end the enabling question of its definition, Tate oddly and perversely begins by abandoning the very means of answering it, even of asking it: "Since I am not able to *define* literary criticism I shall be chiefly concerned with the idea of a formal relation; that is to say, supposing we knew what criticism is, what relation would it have to the humanities, of which it seems to be a constituent part?" It is especially annoying when a few pages later Tate actually defines criticism by description but persists at the same time in avowing that he does not "know" what criticism (or literature either) "is." If it were actually not possible to define literary criticism, then it would seem impossible even to recognize it, to distinguish it as a class of events different from other events. The logical possibility of talking about its "formal relation" to something else is already precluded since, if we cannot recognize criticism, it is not likely that looking for that dependent relation is going to get very far.

Thinking very long about essays of this sort makes one begin to feel that they *are* just idle rhetoric, and that Tate at times can be more fascinated by his pose than by his ideas. That he offers some moderately interesting thoughts on the teaching of literature in the modern world, and that it is Tate's name affixed to them, are small compensation for these unhappy diversions. One wonders, whether in this essay and others, the best fruits of the critical humanist's skeptical and free intelligence are often no more than truism, proliferating generalization, and an elaborate tonality of style. I have picked on "Is Literary Criticism Possible?" only as an actual example of how Tate's romanticism, in becoming a subjective and sentimental *irrationalism,* has sometimes debilitated the work he had to do. Perhaps it was much the same with Poe. It has been generally true that when Tate comes to the theoretical questions he lets himself be carried so far into the murk in his flight from positivist dominance that he sometimes loses sight of the first and simplest necessities of rational discourse. Apart from certain identifiable groans of encouragement and denial, we can no longer understand him. It is as if Montressor has at

last walled him up alive, and he lies down almost willingly where he never wanted to—in darkness, with his cousin Mr. Poe.

But this is not the last circumstance in which we are to see him. Tate's espousal, a few years ago, of Christianity we may understand as a kind of resurrection. My purpose has not been to correct or straighten out Tate's thought, but rather to exhibit his romanticism, to show how his reactionary secular faith in the idea of the traditional society failed to contain it, and finally to portray the end of his quest for form and certainty in his conversion to orthodox Christianity. There were intimations of what the end would be when in 1930 Tate chided the New Humanists in these words: ". . . It is suicidal to keep the cake of religion and eat it too; . . . you cannot have religion without *a* religion." And in the same place Tate quoted (with a little disapproval of the lack of disinterestedness, the interest in action) a suggestive rhetorical question from Yvor Winters: "Mr. Eliot has turned Anglo-Catholic: Mr. Tate contents himself with stating his thesis. . . . One is, however, naturally moved to wonder, of Mr. Eliot how he did it, of Mr. Tate what he is going to do next." The answer developed through the succeeding twenty years of Allen Tate's life, years recorded by at least semi-fictional analogy in Miss Caroline Gordon's recent novel *The Malefactors,* and was finally given when Tate's pilgrimage ended on the high hard ground of Roman Catholic orthodoxy.

Tate has many times proclaimed the need for absolutes, knowing at the same time that he himself hadn't any. And as he seems to have felt the warning in the nightmare sensibility of Poe, he also observed in some of those around him the various ravages of the formless power of romanticism—in Ford Madox Ford, for example, and most tragically in Hart Crane. Tate's wife, Miss Gordon, was a Catholic, and there had been Catholicism in Tate's family—two generations before him on his mother's side. So the Church was a part of his ghostly tradition that had survived live and actual into the present. But he was slow in coming to it. "I am not a Catholic," he said in 1950, the same year he assented, in a statement for the *Partisan Review* symposium on religion and the intellectuals, to a tentative Christian belief, at least through the first sentence of the Athanasian Creed. So far as it is marked in the essays, the conversion seems to have come about 1951, the year in which Tate published the pair of essays on Dante and Poe and the symbolic and angelic imaginations. By 1953 he was urging, quite frankly as a Catholic, that Catholic literature be truly literary and not merely pious or

doctrinal. In the same year he was welcomed home by a writer in *Catholic World* as, along with Mauriac, Eliot, and Graham Greene, a "paradoxical pilgrim," one of the modern Hamlets who had come back to orthodoxy.[2]

The preoccupations of the agrarian with the Old South as a kind of icon of a reactionary political faith have almost entirely faded from Tate's more recent essays. They will probably remain in his work as a poet, though, where the Old South has all along been serving its best purposes purely as the created and suggestive symbol that it is. And Tate has been publishing in recent years parts of a poem that reflects his new circumstances as a Catholic convert. It is written in the meters of Dante's *Divine Comedy,* and is becoming, like that poem, a work of intense vision and reflection. It is also Tate's first really long poem, which seems to bear out his principle, expressed in the criticism, that only a man with a myth can write one.

In the criticism there is still the mystic fervor, but it is now, presumably, regulated by the structures of the Church and sanctioned by the histories of its saints, and need no longer justify itself with the old humanistic slogans of certainty or the ejaculatory jargon of the romantic intuitionist. And the reactionary rage that has given us some of the most memorable literary essays of our time is still fiercely operative. But now it has a definite work to do, something in the nature almost of holy war. It is the Christian work of our time, he told a gathering of Catholic intellectuals in Italy in 1954, not simply to fight Russia and Communism, but to fight "the belief in the omnipotence of reason in the political order," and the "Omnicompetent state" wherever and in whatever form it may arise.

I think one must take the view that where Tate has finally arrived on his pilgrimage has not been precisely a destination in the sense of an ending. Instead of putting down burdens he has taken up new ones. For, as in the case of Eliot, the place where he has chosen to lay his final allegiance has itself become the origin of a new creative progress, Soon, probably, the work of the fifties will be spoken of as the beginning of his third period.

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[2] Though for Tate the modern world must technically have some of the structuring that his allegiance to the Church recognizes, it is still the modern world. There are the mechanical censors and the liberalism of *The Commonweal,* there is Msgr. Sheen in full regalia signaling with the secular hand his gustatory approval from the macaroni ads, and there is the indulgent welcomer in *Catholic World* who as she greets Tate gently reproves him for disparaging the poetry of Joyce Kilmer, Tristram Coffin, and Stephen Vincent Benèt.

KONSTANTINOS LARDAS:

Paschals

I

Lamb
Gifted by tenant farmer
For our feasting
Is now too beautiful for slaughter;
We caress it,
Wind ribbons round its holy head.

Who would dare sweep the knife across its throat?

Now lift it high;
Gift it, in turn,
Still breathing life,
To Gregory
Who clutches at his heart.

This be our paschal gift
To one who was a shepherd
In his youth.

Make his heart glad,
O lamb.

II

The lamb
is now become the ram
To share the second Easter
With its master.
Cross-legged upon the bed he dreams.
Sail silver caiques round his hoary head.

Who would dare stop his fondling of the sheets?

Upon the bed,
His knotted hands mend nets,
Repair the masts
As he awaits
The final Easter.

Death be the paschal gift
To one who hungered for the winds'
White waves.

Sheep, multiply for him;
Masts, swell.

MASON JORDAN MASON:

Cork High

Cork high
Louis

Floating down the stream

The scramble-eggs
and hash
is no food
for the man-eating

Shark

Cork high bloomer

This cold-blood
man-eater
is no teaty-baby
for sure

Too Done Who

He known a long time
like it was

The apple
most big as his head

But the sin came slow
though he regret it
occasionally

Though it is naturally
a little too late

Tell my son
he say

But it is done

And too who
late

RICHARD EMIL BRAUN:

The Unborn

There was no grave to haunt. We all told her.
Never mind. The park is good memorial.
Young fathers bring their brood on Sunday, and
the mothers are there every afternoon
with carriages and tatting. Never mind.

When we all told her, Lily I mean, how
Melena's husband has *that* hanging in
the cellar, Never mind, she said, and be
more cheerful in May. You never know all
the birds are doing, giggle as they will,
the buff ones. Once an Edison man fainted.
Melena's husband just leaves one sleeve hang.

Maybe it began when Lily took on
my Bill. I had the fever. She held him
and I sat alongside there by the duck pond.
She must have added one and one. I am
all sagging now but Lily looks a girl.
She goes alone now. Bill is only four.

Grave or no grave, you never can know. Men
go in cupolas. The company sends
a hundredweight of ingot. I know some
in holy ground. The birds do cry and hang
on near, they did before my mother died,
then flew off, and maybe that is fair
memorial. Steampipes have a way of tapping.

Lily reminds us this one had to grow
and change companions. First a ruby fly,
the second spring it was a bee. And then
a hummingbird that flew without a sound.
This May a sort of wild canary hovers
around her there to visit the old blood.

PETER HELICZER:

Rogan

nesting his girl in thickets
heavy with summer and the odors of the mill
stone the romance of picket
fences forgotten in the shadow of a hill

wildly and once withholding
our own son rogan passes his days
i know this from the paper you are folding
deep in your eyes soft glaze

ah mary maud did ever
swallows play with your girlhoods hair
and did some red clever
boy standing under the porch stairs

kiss you i was not
boy or swallows and what they had done
caused me to love you and you
adore awkwardly the ripening of our son

Poem Written with a Green Pencil

ophelia her hair down singing
and my self without shoelaces
or stockings chases
the she sparrow that came in at the window
what are you bringing
egg shells speckled all over the floor
ophelia her hair down singing
what is there more

enigmatic of beauty now is the season
to catch squirrels lethargic and fat
ophelia singing
what are you bringing
autumn what are you bringing

ophelia your hair is autmun your song is august
but i am winter ophelia
every day you die
but every day
i am nearer to being born

PETER MILLER:

Journey into the Interior

and for the long trek inward
what gear to wear?
like an acute accent
a derby tilted over gaiety
or a topee squared
against an inner wrath?

then how to proceed?
afoot wittily to test the thought for traps
or upon an elephantine gravity
to trample over underplots?

equipment is required of consequence
— Mausers firecrackers honed perceptions
rhymes beads smiles and a two-way antenna
— with these expedients to appease the pygmies
our safari may penetrate the
heartland.

CARL HARTMAN:

Ithaca on Sunday: A Bell in the Flats

Here, now, in this ungolden hour
of Sunday sleep, any Sunday at ten,
on this wooden-walled and fragile street

straining to itself its own facade
of timber, shingle, leaves of paint,
here and now the bell begins.

Baptist, but lodged in a tower built by
God knows whom, it does not toll
or knell or peal: it rings the air

as a mortar shell will shatter, bursting,
even sound, your mouth still wide
with a cry no one ever heard —

but the pitch of the bell is higher
bruiting a more Christian call.
A hundred and twenty times the bell must

smash the air, the ear, must press
the marrow, stir to heaven motes
that never asked redemption. Hesitation,

this ringer knows, will make
of any ritual a torture dark
as dreams. While spaces lengthen,

hover . . . There in his tower,
lodged in his lair, does he too await
some coming burst of fire?

Finally the bell ceases. Then the
cars arrive. Assembled, collected,
parked along our street like garnish,

they deny the facade. The wheel,
even in stillness, gleams. A thousand
suns are mirrored here, steadily —

only the walls, still resonant,
are conscious of a threat. Silent,
the bell charges its dignity.

SHEILA PRITCHARD:

Maine Morning

When the wearied strange tides,
        Spanishly move onto Maine,
mutely dancing the coarse coast,
        subsiding, sucked into depths
                to relax and be turned
                        to return,
and the left ruffled foam
        dries on the cleft rocks
        tied by strangled seaweed and cracked
                        shell,
        to dry into faked bubbles,

two things usually happen:
        first, the commercial shell-hunter
        spangles the early shore
        with straying eyes, stooped hands,
and then, full from breakfast,
        race spaniels and released boys
discovering their fresh morning sand.

LAURENCE DONOVAN:

The Sun Makes a Few Remarks

Take the red house on the palmed hill.
It is a transparent felicity. Take
The glass-true bay tinily wild with boats.
Take three soaring gulls. Now, tell me true,
In your secret heart is the gulled sky roofed?
Is the red house dreaming under water?

Remove one wall for vision. For
Proportion let one sail slip
Over out of sight. Release one gull.
Now bring the eyes
To bear on the exposed heart of house.
Who is the princess who waves to you
Paused in red housekeeping? Who
Are the stark figures moving silent behind?
And are they human there beneath the boats?

Now bring the eyes
To bear on the naked bay.
Why do the slanting sails glide
Through the furniture? What
Do they seek, there by the unseeing princess,
What ghostly glyph?

Now look to the gulls. And look
To yourself, interpreter, destroyer.
These felicities are my constant changes
And you are not innocent of them.

JAMES B. HALL:

The Fish Camp under the Snow

When the hired men turned their backs and walked across the barnyard to get fed, Old Man climbed the fence again and ran into his orchard. The furious double-bitted light of Old Man's axe blinked in the snow blowing, and the trunk of the only Winesap cried out Oh, Oh.

But Old Man swung again and again in the half-light of the snow storm at noon. Anger and thin ice covered man and tree trunk and farmyard and covered even his whiskers as he circled the flashing double-bitted light around the last young tree in the orchard until the trunk cracked.

"He's in again."

The cat could not bear the screams of the Winesap, so he wove himself among the work boots of the men. In the cold wind of noon the cat was a tallow-colored, liquid fish, swimming through their legs, headed for the kitchen door.

Old Man retired from the farm too soon and now his son and the wife would not let him on the place. When their backs were turned Old Man would get another tree, or he would chop at a corner of the barn so that the joists or a foundation log cried out and the mice ran away through their burrows towards the woods.

The wife stood fat upon the back steps, throwing a pan of hot water at the snow. The cat dodged the water and the steam.

"Get out and mouse, you lazy thing!"

"Mouse in this weather, with no work shoes or boots or even rags for my feet? Well, the cat said to himself, I can also do that . . ."

Under the cloud of steam from the snow the cat held up his head and plucked at the snow with uplifted paws as he walked towards the side door. The cat wove his tallow-colored body between two boots which tracked snow into the dining room, and he was soon in a corner behind the bottle-gas stove.

"You back?" said the grain of salt, and then mimicked the wife: "Get out and mouse, you lazy thing!"

The cat knew very well that the blue-slate grain of salt would someday get swept outside into the moisture, or perhaps even into

some rain. Therefore the cat said without rancor, "Old Man's in the orchard. He got the Winesap. A terrible racket."

"That's good," said the grain of salt, for he mistook his own clarity of shape for real wisdom. The grain of salt had once fallen off a side of bacon when the son tried to smoke meat for a change. "Old Man is crazy anyway."

"Even so, that's the last Winesap on the place," the cat said. "Old Man wasn't shaved, and that sheepskin hat flapped around his ears, and his whiskers blowing in the snow. I had to laugh—until the tree cried out."

"Two stoves I've outlasted," the woodbox said, "real stoves, and I can tell you some things about this place."

Woodbox had been mitred into the side of the kitchen a long time ago. When the bottle-gas was installed the wife used the wood box for her spare table. The woodbox was a fixture, so he always talked about the good old days, when Old Man was young.

"Now *I* remember that Old Man once . . ."

"Got him," said the dishrag. From his small line above the stove the dishrag could see out the window and across the orchard towards the encircling woods.

"That's good," said the grain of salt.

"That's trouble. Now I get kicked out by the wife. It's cold out there. Ever sleep in a corn crib?"

"Get out and mouse, you lazy cat," the grain of salt mimicked once more.

Because there was only the noise of the hired men chewing their food in the dining room, and because the wife was for the moment upstairs combing her hair (someone might go to town that afternoon) the cat said:

"Well, I'll tell you a little story. About my fish camp."

"That will be good," said the grain of salt, for he felt, secretly, that he must surely be the salt of the earth, and besides he had cured a little meat.

"Not that one again," the dishrag said, for though he was rapidly drying out above the stove, he could see someone dragging the double-bitted axe and Old Man towards the crib.

"True, you may have heard, but it amuses me. Besides if I were going to be scrubbed to threads on this floor or given to Old Man to blow his nose on, I'd like a little entertainment."

"That's good," said the grain of salt, for he was dry and cheery

and felt he had with no help at all cured a great deal of meat in his time.

"Well, one day on Todd's Fork, about ten miles from here (when I was much younger) I built me a fish camp."

The kettle, who had a bottom of iron and much heat and the best of everything, steamed and steamed and said, "I'll bet."

"Frankly, it wasn't much when I picked up the acreage. But I could see the possibilities. No one has ever claimed I wasn't all right in that way.

"On a nice bluff overlooking Todd's Fork, it was, and at the bottom of the front steps was a long riffle which made fife music when the creek was at middle height in July. In summertime those flat rocks were dry and warm. On my nice rocks you could do anything you wanted: fish, or simply watch minnows weave like snowflakes in the deep water, or you could sit out there at night and watch the moon through branches of my cottonwoods. If there chanced to be a moon, of course.

"Well, I built the place up, a little each year. You will remember that those were indecent times, with much bootlegging and any number of beer camps all along the whole creek. But we kept a family place, and that's not easy.

"Nevertheless, old customers would send or call for reservations, and they brought their friends. I put in small purple boats so they could row out across the rock pool at the foot of the riffles and could float around and around and around with the current. Also sand boxes for children. Then I put in fishing tackle, if someone wanted to drop a line into the water of the rock pool from my little purple boats. Our guests came during the summer months, but in late fall when the leaves changed to saffron, we settled in for the winter.

"I say 'we.' My wife and myself. She did the cooking and the planning and everything inside. I did the purple boats and organized the entertainment, and built the chalets, and kept the outside rustic, but comfortable. During the season we were both awake at dawn, and I'd be up with the games and the bingo until midnight. During the winter we relaxed and did not go outside the lodge from one day to the next.

"Then children. I don't regret them at all. Five daughters. Why, when they were growing up they would tumble about in front of our fireplace in winter and climb all over my back and take the laces out of my shoes, and all of that.

"So I had to expand a bit. Dowries. We saved every penny, but without letting our daughters know, so as not to spoil it. I had to charge extra for my rowboats; I had to rent the tackle, and we allowed tipping. Most of all we worked hard and you can ask anyone that remembers, it was the best little place along Todd's Fork, and it's still there.

"As I said, we gave our daughters everything, within reason. They had music lessons and their teeth straightened and all of that. Frankly, I was glad we always had kept the place for a good class of people: our guests brought their sons year after year. You know how that is. Our daughters all married, in order, and those dowries did not at all hurt anyone's feelings.

"Except our baby. She was the last one at home. A pretty little thing, but I imagine we spoiled her.

" 'Father,' she said one fall night after she had been absent again all day, 'I want you to meet a friend.'

"I'd heard this 'friend' thing before. They always put it that way. I was polite as usual, and I offered him a seat in front of the fire and I said, 'What's on your mind?'

" 'No thank you,' this big black Tom says, 'I'll remain standing.'

"That he did, and our youngest daughter (who was golden-colored like myself) stood there beside him.

" 'We are married,' the black Tom says. 'And we want to help with this place now that you and Mother are getting on.'

"How do you like that? Mother!

"Ran away and got married on the sly. And, sizing up this bird, thinks I: 'Maybe none too soon.'

"That was that, and in moves the black Tom and our Betsy.

"First, trouble in the kitchen. Mother and Daughter trouble. Had they listened to me, however, it might all have turned out for the best.

"Then this black Tom had a lot of ideas, and I'll admit some of them were not bad. He said we ought to have a real operation: Chuck-a-Luck, Faro, and Black Jack. I'll admit he cut a nice deck of cards, and no one had ever seen a man smoother on the deal. Also he was a sport.

"Then all kinds of people showed up, and no one rented my boats or sat on the flat rocks in the middle of the stream.

"This black Tom and our little Betsy made a pile, and they went South for the winter. Mother and I stayed on as usual, but people kept knocking at the door at all hours of the day, or at night they

stamped and shouted outside in the snow, wanting to get even.

"Then my wife died — suddenly of course — and there I was.

"That spring I turned over the nicest little fish camp on the whole of Todd's Fork to our Betsy and the black Tom. I walked out with nothing but the clothes on my back. In those days the motif was rustic, as I said, so I always wore a Tyrolean hat with a big feather and *lederhosen*. That's what I was wearing the day I walked out of the nicest little fish camp in Southern Ohio, or maybe the whole Midwest.

"Well, I tried it several places. The daughters were all settled, and were all glad to see me. But a man can only sleep so long on a couch with everyone walking through all night and babies crying. First I tried it with the eldest daughter, and then right on down the line: in Cincinnati, in Dayton and in Springfield. But there was no place for me. They now had lives of their own, and I could understand that, and I really did not mind . . ."

"Very well I remember," the woodbox said, for he was the local historian. "Very well I remember the day you first slipped in that kitchen door."

"Because a very old guest," said the cat, "told me of this spot."

The dishrag was nearly dried out above the stove, but he could see. Across the orchard the Winesap was now becoming a hump of purple under its own drift. The kettle steamed and thought of some far-off land, perhaps an Emperor's house where all the china was no thicker than the inner leaf of an onion.

"So what about the big fish camp?" the grain of salt wanted to know.

"Still there," and it pleased the cat that someone was interested. "Boarded up, but still there. Yes sir. That black Tom always heads South. He puts it all on the horses."

"That's good," said the grain of salt too promptly, but made the best of it. "That at least gives your youngest daughter pleasure."

"Ha," the cat said, and flicked at the baseboard with one unbuckled claw. "He dropped our Betsy for a black one that hung around all one summer playing Faro."

"Then where is your youngest daughter?"

"Not knowing," the cat said with great finality, "I could not say."

"But you care?"

"Of course I care. And what's the good of that?"

"Just the same, the fish camp is there. Boarded up."

The cat refused to answer any question that either missed the point or failed to amuse him.

"Get out and mouse, you lazy thing!"

The wife swept the cat out the back door with her broom. She had combed her hair and began to rattle her dishes in the sink so she could go to town for the afternoon with the son. They both thought it was snowing too hard to work. But she seemed to think it was easy to mouse in just any weather, with no boots or even rags on the feet. Finally the wife hung the dishrag back on the line, and left the kitchen.

"He'll be back all right," the dishrag said.

"That's good," said the grain of salt. "*If* he gets a mouse."

The dishrag and the grain of salt began to argue again about moisture:

"Suppose I dropped some of my water on you? Suppose that."

"Fat chance. I'm safe forever, for all she sweeps behind a stove."

"There goes cat," the dishrag said, for he could see into the snow-filled yard.

"Has he got one?"

"Of course he has," the woodbox said, though he could not see outside. "He keeps a mouse tucked away in the crib. Frozen. He drags it out once a day."

"Well, there goes cat. Strutting like a lion. Exactly where the wife can see him."

"He's a lion, all right," the woodbox said with all the complacency of history. "He's a lion for sure."

When the wife went out the door to go to town with the son, she forgot her purse. She always forgot her purse. She had to run back into the house. She was in a hurry. The cat wove himself cleverly between her overshoes, and came back to his spot near the baseboard where the furnace gave him a nice Midwestern sirocco.

"It's cold out there," he said, as though he had actually done some work. "Old Man is tied up in the back seat. He's butting his head against the cushions, he's so angry. But they are taking him away this time."

"No more Winesap," the dishrag said.

"That's good."

"—What I want to know," the cat said, for he had been thinking, "is what Son and the Wife want. Answer me that?"

"To move to town," the woodbox said, "and get a tenant on this

place to do all the work."

"Goodbye, grain of salt," the dishrag said, but it was a somber thought.

"Also," the woodbox said again with a bishop's easy finality, "also they want to get rid of Old Man. For good. That's exactly what Old Man did. You can depend on it: like father, like son."

"Say," the cat said as he melted his tallow-colored body in the direction of the warm breath of the furnace duct, "did I ever tell you about my fish camp?"

"Yes, you did," the woodbox said firmly, for the truth of it was that the cat was getting on. Was forgetful.

"Don't get mad," the cat said, and turned over to sleep once more through a long afternoon.

Everything was quiet. Ahead of them all was only an afternoon of small noises, something like the rustle of water among the flat rocks of a stream, or the rustle of the small footprints of a snowflake before it melts.

The kettle steamed and steamed and dreamed and dreamed: of an Emperor in his garden where the sun was, and seven ladies holding seven tea roses and reclining under the carved arch of alabaster.

The Old Emperor, the Young Emperor and their tawny dragons of gold also came along the pathways. They walked beneath the arch where light blinked on the sharp double-bitted leaves of a vine.

"Tell us a story," the Emperor said to his poet, and as he spoke, the china tea cups no thicker than the inner leaf of an onion chimed and were bells upon the table of black wood.

The poet smiled, and bowed, for he was the poet.

"Tell us again," the Emperor said, for he was the Emperor, "tell once more of an ancient House of Summer that is high upon a mountain where lilies float on a small canal."

And this was done.

WALLACE FOWLIE:

Two American Autobiographies

HENRY MILLER: *Big Sur and the Oranges of Hieronymus Bosch.* New Directions.

MARY McCARTHY: *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood.* Harcourt, Brace.

Henry Miller reached California in 1942. He began living at Big Sur in 1944. In 1947 he moved into a house on Partington Ridge, in Big Sur, where he has been living ever since. Partington Ridge is fourteen miles south of the Big Sur Post Office and forty miles from Monterey. Early in his new book, on page twenty-three, Mr. Miller explains the allusion to the fifteenth-century Dutch painter Hieronymus Bosch. In examining a fragment of the famous triptych, "The Millennium," Miller was fascinated by the realism of the oranges hanging from the trees. Bosch is one of those artists who for Miller have a magic vision and who reveal the original aspect of the world. Bosch quite probably belonged to an heretical order called the Brethren and Sisters of the Free Spirit who considered their community life "Paradise." During these past thirteen years in Big Sur, Henry Miller has been constantly reminded that he himself now is living in a kind of paradise. His innumerable visitors point this out to him, but he has never needed any convincing on the matter. His book is an effort to describe exactly what kind of paradise he found in Big Sur, and, more exactly, what kind of paradise he has constructed out of it.

The book is embellished with photographs of the real world: the ocean at the foot of Big Sur, the mountains, Miller's two children Valentin and Tony; and with reproductions of the panels in Bosch's "Millennium." And the text, likewise, of this book is the constant juxtaposition of the real world and the world of the spirit. Miller moves eagerly between the visible phenomenal world and that spiritual activity which is the explanation of the real world. The small community of Big Sur, in the state of California, and the stylized painted world of the vision of Hieronymus Bosch, are the two extremes of Mr. Miller's considerations. Between them every thought and every activity of his life can find their place. And they do find their place, in this compendious autobiography.

Big Sur has been Miller's first real home. Previously he looked upon himself as a vagabond and an outlaw, as the world's most celebrated bohemian. In another century, in the opposite part of the United States, Emerson claimed that he lived in solitude and seclusion in Concord but actually the world found its way to him and peopled his solitude. Miller insists on the isolation of Big Sur and its wildness, but the pages of his book narrate the comings and goings of so many friends and tourists, so many souls eager to talk with him or at least to see him, that one doubts the experience of any prolonged solitude. Those who know his work come to him from all parts of the world. And

he so enters the lives of his neighbors, who are not always artists or writers, that each family he describes is the subject of a separate story. Physically he does weary of the endless visitations, the unannounced guests, the long conversations, but humanistically he is stimulated by them. Even the bores help to reaffirm his existence as man and his career as writer. There are many vignettes in the book, many short scenes and portraits, narrated and etched with Miller's famous smoothly-flowing and exuberant style. There are a few expanded sections, notably the long episode on Conrad Moricand which was published separately as *Devil in Paradise* and which is a document on Miller's sense of human relationship, on his humor, his generosity, his vitality.

The themes in Henry Miller's writings cannot be segregated into historical periods. They are all present in this latest book as they have been present in every preceding book. His debts to friends, both famous and not famous, are stated here in more abundance and more detail than elsewhere. Varda, Varèse, Ephraim Doner, George Leite, Lawrence Durrell, Joseph Delteil, Jaime de Angulo and countless others form a diverse and engrossing company in this one man's life. Miller's attentiveness to his friends, and his powers of adaptability are miraculous. He himself, as he speaks to his friends, or writes to them, is the image of natural man manifesting all of his impulsions and instincts, and demonstrating on every day of his recorded narrative a heart not divided against itself, a heart without contradiction.

I am quite certain that Henry Miller believes he has had more experiences in life than most men. *Big Sur* substantiates a corollary belief that experience has no value unless it culminates in some kind of vision. Morality, in any of its orthodox senses, is of no concern for Miller. It is outside his experience, outside his belief. The opportunity of knowing directly or through correspondence a few individuals has provided him with his essential knowledge and understanding of the world. He has little or no interest in dogmas, doctrines, cults, beliefs, religions. He has little interest in facts as such. Everything in his world and in his active imagination is symbolic and capable of interpretation. How often has he testified to the greatness of Whitman's poetry, and especially to the greatness of Whitman as human being! The meaning of Balzac's *Seraphita* (which is the actual origin of Moricand's visit to Big Sur and the episode entitled *Paradise Lost*) corresponds to Miller's inexhaustible but indefinable faith in the symbolic.

Henry Miller's harsh judgment on America is repeated in *Big Sur*. It is really a condemnation of progress. The machine is the peril for mankind and the explanation of human mediocrity. Henry Miller sounds like an anarchist in his denunciation of money. He sounds like a utopian in his denunciation of war, lying, suffering. His revolt is essentially social. He underscores the absurdity of the capitalist regime with its impoverished class and its thousands of underpaid workers. He predicts future catastrophes as lyrically as he speaks forth his belief in fraternal goodness, in non-violence, in the peace of primitivism. In Big Sur he has found a kind of private Eden, a colony of a utopian characteristic which he would be the first to recognize as a recurrent American phenomenon.

I find that the most spectacular of Miller's works, *Black Spring,* for example, and *Tropic of Capricorn,* have to be read without interruption. They unfold

like plains of words which cannot be subdivided. *Big Sur* is perhaps not so spectacular as some of the earlier works, but it is essentially the same kind of book, of the same uniform geology. The stupendous view of sky and sea and mountain which Miller enjoys from Partington Ridge is comparable to the vast space he needs as a writer. Each book of his is a kind of proliferation in which he tries to exhaust the cosmos. It is finally the reader who is exhausted because he has to race with the book. The rhythm of the sentences describing his walks in Big Sur reminds me of the rhythm of his sentences describing, in *Tropic of Cancer,* his walks through Paris. The flowing of everything, the swiftness with which everything passes, the rapidity of the words themselves, keep the books of Miller outside the category of the obscene or the erotic.

The greatness of Miller is his capacity to feel all of man's panic and fears. The countless characters, strangers and friends, he speaks with or speaks of in *Big Sur* are like the characters in the mind of a man who cannot sleep. He is both sensitive and rough in his analyses of these hallucinations. As a writer he is never allowed to put down his pen, because what he has to say concerning the strange and not-strange creatures who people his life, can never come to an end. He is unable to set himself a limit. When he writes, he does not intend to create a work of art. He intends to write, with reckless energy and with reckless truthfulness, all that comes to his mind. More than most men, he lives in forbidden zones and outer space. He sees magnetically and pierces all walls, all lives. Many of his readers will recognize themselves in *Big Sur,* and they may forget in their surprise of recognition that the heart who wrote this book is one of the most open, one of the most vulnerable, and one of the most often wounded.

A far different example of recent American autobiography is Mary McCarthy's *Memories of a Catholic Girlhood.* This is a rigorously composed book, in eight connected episodes which relate the very mixed Catholic, Protestant and Jewish background of the writer's early life in Minneapolis and Seattle. It is the writing of a trained and skillful novelist. Even as a child and as a young girl Mary McCarthy had the curiosity of a story-teller in her awareness of inconspicuous details as well as of major events. Her memory has resisted time in the patterns it has formed of the past, and whenever her memory has failed her, she has sought out the facts and the scenes and the statements. Her heart, perhaps more Catholic today than she would acknowledge, has always been understanding of human weaknesses and whims, a heart as compassionate for the travesties and tragedies of human nature as it is demanding of the more purely intellectual values of our day.

The chapters of these *Memories* have been written and published over a period of years. In revising them for book form, Miss McCarthy has appended to each one a few pages of comment, usually concerning the truthfulness of details, the accuracy of her memory, and the various ways in which she has checked on her own narrative. The storyteller in Miss McCarthy tends always to outstrip the memorialist. Each chapter is such a closely woven narrative, so rich in detail and observation and insight, that its coda at the end provides a relaxation for the reader, a salutary pause in the extraordinary intensity which Miss McCarthy creates when she is writing at her best pitch. In these freer

pages, which embellish the book, she argues with herself about the laws of her craft and calls upon her reader to observe this trait and that flaw in the implacable rules governing human memory.

Miss McCarthy claims there is nothing remarkable about her family. They were just above average, and typical of their class. Mary was born in Seattle, in 1912, the first of four children. Her father's family came from Ireland and settled first in Nova Scotia. Her mother was the daughter of a prominent Seattle lawyer. The two parents died in the flu epidemic of 1918. Mary and her three brothers were brought up first by Uncle Myers who beat them frequently with the razor strap. During those five years of very painful existence, she was protected by her religious practices. She writes movingly of the aesthetic outlet which Catholicism offered her: in the Mass, the litanies, the Latin hymns, even the votive candles. Today Miss McCarthy calls herself a "lapsed" Catholic and expresses a doubt in the existence of God, but she records a feeling of gratitude to her Catholic training for the sense of culture and history it provided, for the references it taught which facilitated later readings of Dante and Crashaw and Eliot. There is in this book a sense of nostalgia for Catholicism, reminiscent of Renan's in his *Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse,* especially in the mystery she once felt in such rituals as the imposition of ashes on Ash Wednesday and the blessing of the throats on the feast day of Saint Blaise.

There is a total absence of cynicism and even wit in the moving portraits she gives of the Sisters who taught her at the Convent School and who referred to Voltaire and Lord Byron and Baudelaire. Two portraits seem to dominate all others in this autobiography of many portraits. One is that of Miss Gowrie, a Scottish Presbyterian Latin teacher who stimulated in Mary a love for Caesar's *Commentaries* and a hero worship of Vercingetorix. The other is the remarkably elaborate and almost stylized portrait of her Jewish grandmother in Seattle, Mrs. Preston, whom we see gliding about in her electric car or shopping or caring for her beauty in her large bathroom.

It is especially in this chapter on the habits of the large Seattle house, on its strangeness, on its lack of animation and human life, that the reader senses what an admirable acceptance of self Miss McCarthy has reached. She understands her nature and she knows her private morality. Yet she knows also her limitations and she specifies them. I find Miss McCarthy's language without defect. As one follows, with a rare pleasure, the continuity of her narrative and its composition, one follows also the shaping of a mind and a character.

This book is an experiment of the author, an experiment with her thoughts. The writing of such a book about oneself is not a simple exercise. Miss McCarthy knows that to write well is to give the best chances to truth, to the effort of remaining truthful. She has achieved a kind of autobiography, the work of a living vital memory which has willed to seize time again in its movement, in its ceaseless unfolding. The value of such a book is in its rhythm and in its power of confiding. It is the truth of something that passes. This is a book not only about a story already over, but about an existence turned toward the future, about an existence which, when it speaks of the past, seems to create itself anew in the present.

An autobiography is inevitably something of a confession. From her girlhood Miss McCarthy remembers the full meaning of an act of confession. It

means the exposing of oneself, the public confession of one's deficiencies, the making public of what is private. Any human existence, I suppose, when it is narrated, will appear to be a strange concatenation of motifs and effects. At the basis of any introspection there is the desire for self-contemplation, and behind every confession, the desire to be absolved. A good confession always brings satisfaction. It may bring, dangerously, pride in one's humiliation. It is easy to find such pride in Rousseau, but I can discover no trace of it in Mary McCarthy. Her book is the kind which instantly, even on the first reading, seems a classic. It is an admirable essay on the interpretation of self.

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